PACQUIAO vs MATTHYSSE

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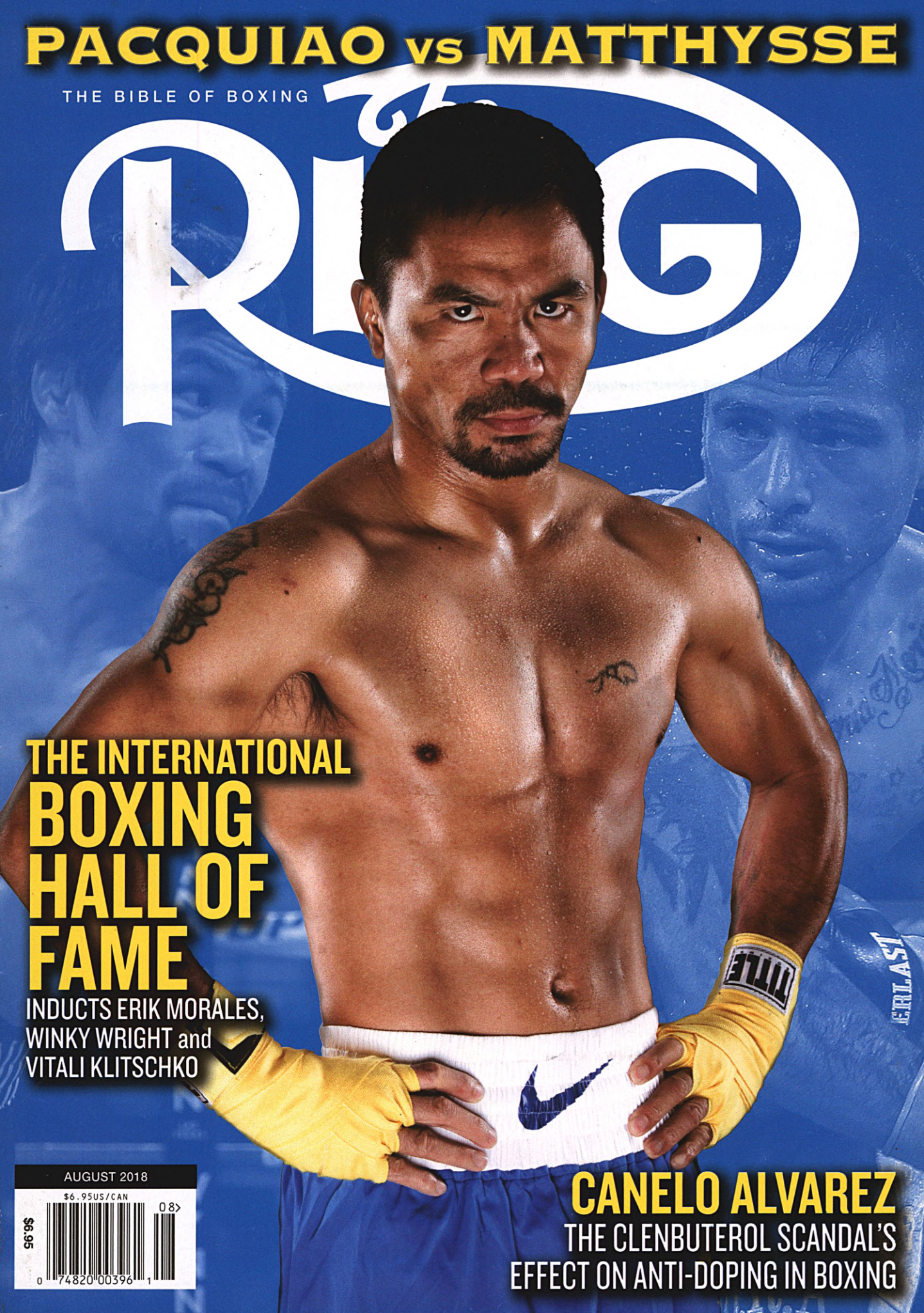

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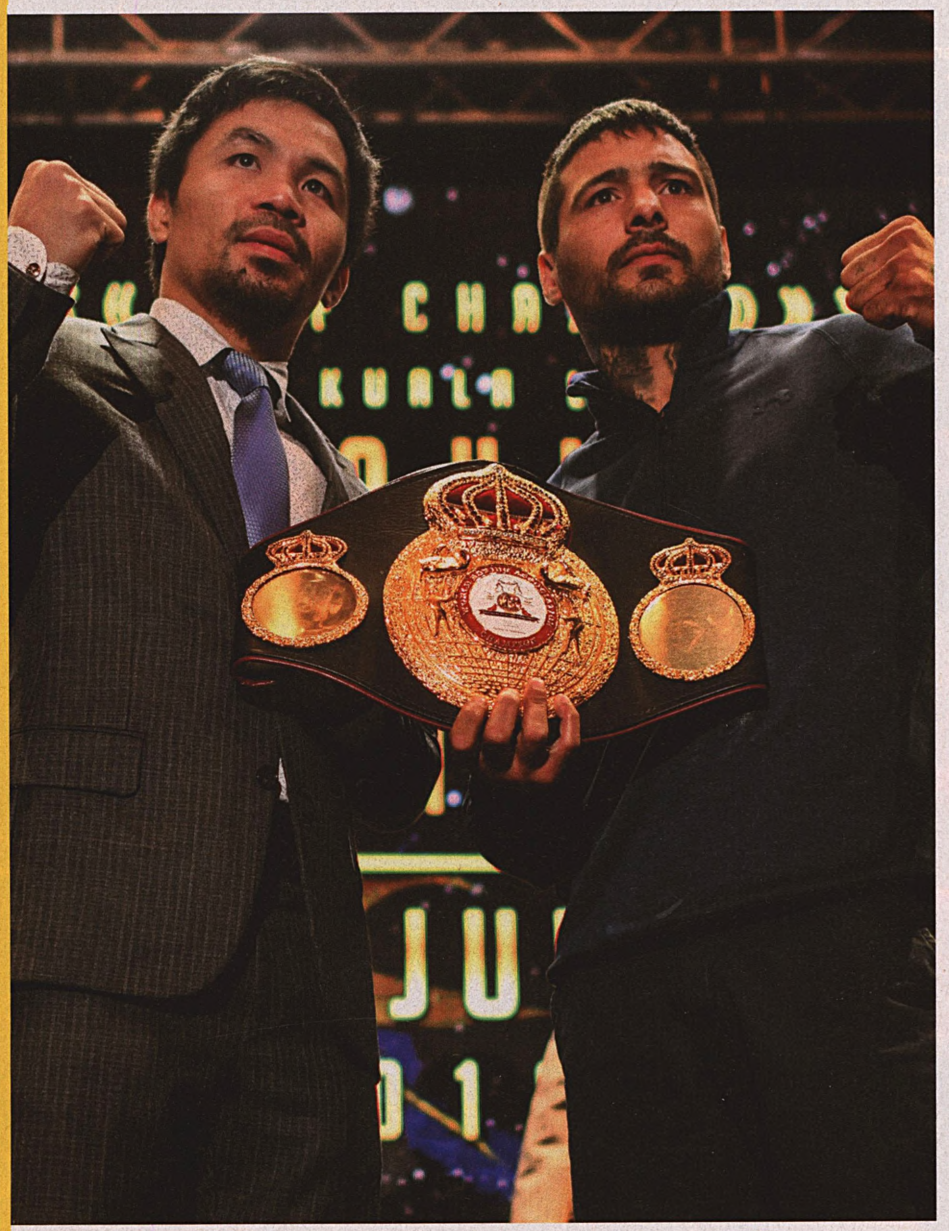

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COVER PHOTO BY MIKEY WILLIAMS FOR TOP RANK

MOHD RASFAN

OPENING SHOT

After nine rounds, the competitive lightweight championship fight between Jorge Linares and Vasiliy Lomachenko was up for grabs. "Gutted" is the best way to describe Linares and his supporters when it became obvious that he would not be able to continue fighting after Lomachenko put him down with a perfect left to the liver in Round 10. (Photo by Mikey Williams for Top Rank)

Some fans believe that the Arturo Gatti-Micky Ward trilogy was the best three-bout series in boxing history. Reader Victor Rivero says there have been better, such as Rocky Graziano-Tony Zale (bottom left) and Rafael Marquez-Israel Vazquez (at least if you only count the first three fights).

THREE-PEATS

On the anniversary of the first Gatti-Ward fight (May 18, 2002) I'm reading and hearing people say it was the greatest trilogy ever. Ever? Ever is a very long time! Don't get me wrong; it was a great rivalry, but NOT the greatest. Like most rivalries, the first fight is usually the best of the series, but here are two examples off of the top of my head that were better …

Graziano-Zale. They not only exchanged victories along with the world middleweight championship, they exchanged knockout victories for the title. None of their fights even got close to a decision. My personal favorite rivalry is Rafael Marquez vs. Israel Vazquez. I know technically they fought four times and not three, but Vazquez had no eyelids by the fourth fight, so I just look at the first three. Each fight was better than the last, and after stopping each other in their first two wars, the third fight came down to the last seconds of the last round, with both fighters again tasting the canvas. Greatest rivalry I ever witnessed.

Victor Rivero
Pacifica, Calif.

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Pictured left to right: Damon Allen Jr., Jessie Vargas, Fernando Vargas

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

BY DOUGLASS FISCHER

LINARES-LOMACHENKO WAS BOXING DONE RIGHT

What were your takeaways from the Jorge Linares-Vasiliy Lomachenko fight?

Did Lomachenko's 10th-round stoppage of the talented Venezuelan, which earned him the RING and WBA lightweight titles, prove that he's the best boxer on the planet?

Does winning world titles in a third weight class in only his 12th pro bout mean the wizardly Ukrainian southpaw is already worthy of the International Boxing Hall of Fame?

Or did the sixth-round knockdown he suffered against Linares, who boxed well enough to have the fight up for grabs after nine rounds, show that Lomachenko has reached his physical limit at 135 pounds and may be vulnerable to an elite lightweight boxer-puncher like Mikey Garcia?

I'm going to level with you, dear readers: I don't care what your answers or opinions are regarding any of those questions. My main takeaway from Linares-Lomachenko is that it was a quality fight that entertained a wide audience.

That's all that really matters to the sport.

Hardcore heads love to debate the career trajectory, pound-for-pound ranking and hall-of-fame worthiness of a potential superstar, but this brand of geeky pontification doesn't bring new fans to boxing.

Hotly contested world championship bouts on basic cable will attract new viewers to the sport. Boxing delivered on May 12 because everyone involved with Linares-Lomachenko did the right thing:

The fighters challenged themselves. Linares could have continued to outclass fringe contenders on HBO; Lomachenko could have been content to embarrass featherweights and junior lightweights in defense of his 130-pound belt, but both competitors wanted – and, in fact, demanded from their promoters – more.

The promoters worked together. Golden Boy, which promotes Linares, and Top Rank, which reps Lomachenko, set aside differences and network affiliations to make one of the best possible lightweight matchups.

The fight landed in the right arena at the right time. The significance of the championship bout was enhanced by a 10,000-plus crowd of passionate fans assembled inside the "Mecca of Boxing," Madison Square Garden, and it was fitting that the Boxing Writers Association of America held its annual awards dinner – where Lomachenko; his father, Anatoly; and manager Egis Klimas received honors for Fighter, Trainer and Manager of the Year – the night before the big fight.

And it was broadcast on the largest possible platform. The Linares-Lomachenko telecast on ESPN, which is in around 90 million U.S. households, was cable television's highest-rated fight of 2018 so far.

The fight peaked at 1.75 million live viewers. I guarantee that Lomachenko – who appears well on his way to becoming a bona fide attraction – made new fans on May 12.

I guarantee that those same fans, many of whom had no idea who Linares was prior to May 12, want to see him fight again also.

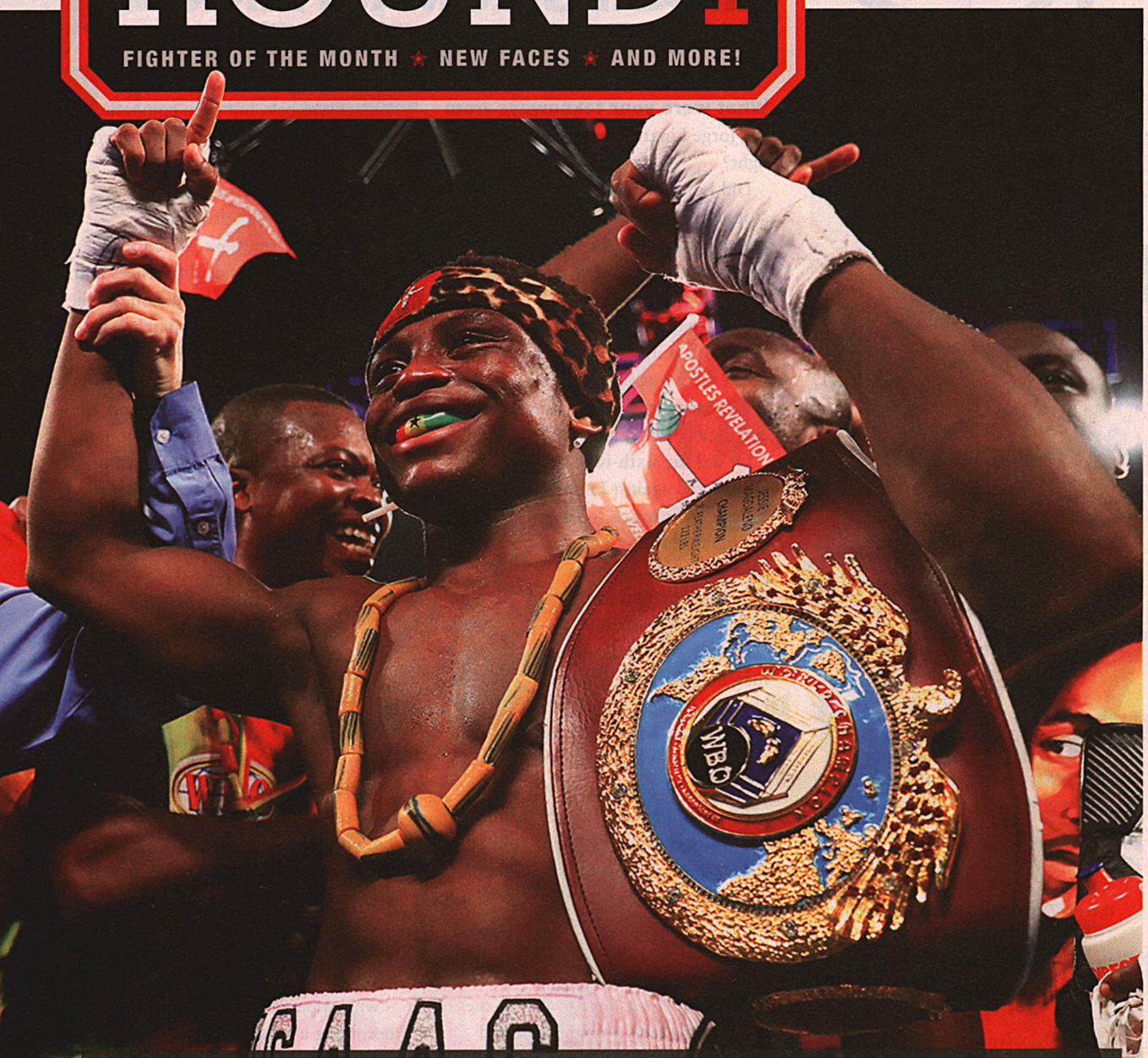
I guarantee that many of the hardcore fans who already knew Linares well and dismissed his chances against Lomachenko have a newfound respect for the veteran.

Linares-Lomachenko was that rare occasion when the status of both the winner and loser were elevated by what transpired in the ring, and proof once again that when boxing does the right thing, everybody wins.

ROUND 1

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH ★ NEW FACES ★ AND MORE!

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH



MIKEY WILLIAMS FOR TOP RANK

ISAAC DOGBOE

The relentless manner in which Isaac Dogboe wore down Jessie Magdaleno to seize the WBO 122-pound belt on April 28 in Philadelphia invoked some familiar boxing adages: "Pressure busts pipes," "Will beats skill" and "You can run, but you can't hide" (famously coined by Joe Louis prior to the heavyweight champ's first fight against Billy Conn). Dogboe (19-0, 13 knockouts) got up from an opening-round knockdown and remained in the savvier-boxing titleholder's grill in the competitive early going before taking control of the fight in the fifth by dropping Magdaleno. The gutsy 23-year-old challenger from Accra, Ghana (which has spawned so many world-class boxers over the decades), used a brutal, two-fisted body attack to eventually overwhelm the American southpaw in Round 11. Dogboe does not possess the sublime ring craft of Ghana's greatest boxer, Azumah Nelson, or the sharp technique of former welterweight standout Ike Quartey, but his fighting spirit does his nation's rich boxing history – as well as his culture's ancient warrior tradition – very proud. RING

ADVANCED DEGREES

Usually this column features "degrees of separation between fighters of the past and their more contemporary counterparts." This month it's all about the past – but not by much. Regular contributor Gregg Morgan linked all three of the Modern category inductees from the International Boxing Hall of Fame's Class of 2018 – Erik Morales, Winky Wright and Vitali Klitschko – in just seven steps:

Erik Morales fought

Manny Pacquiao, who fought

Shane Mosley, who fought

Winky Wright, who fought

Bernard Hopkins, who fought

Chad Dawson, who fought

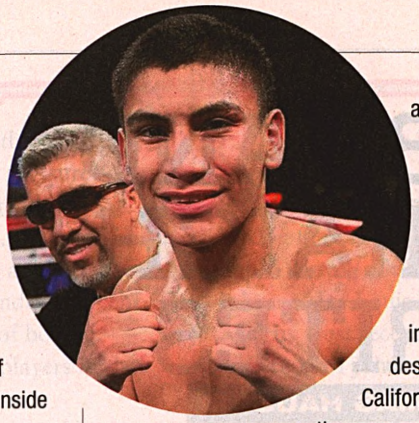
Tomasz Adamek, who fought

Vitali Klitschko

NEW FACES

VERGIL ORTIZ JR.

BY ANSON WAINWRIGHT



Junior welterweight prospect Vergil Ortiz Jr. has breezed through the first two years of his pro career, stopping all nine of his opponents inside three rounds.

The 20-year-old puncher's success is not surprising. Ortiz began boxing when he was only 5 years old and won seven national tournaments as an amateur, including the 2013 Junior Olympics and three consecutive Silver Gloves, en route to compiling a 140-20 record.

The Texas native had aspirations of participating in the Olympic Games in Rio but at 16 was too young to compete in the Trials. He didn't want to wait through another four-year cycle, so he elected to sign with Golden Boy Promotions in 2016.

Ortiz is happy with how things have turned out since making that decision.

"I have the NABF title already, so I think I'm progressing pretty fast and well," Ortiz told THE RING.

Frequent RING contributor Steve Kim, who resides in Southern California where Ortiz trains, is impressed with what he has seen of the young boxer-puncher so far.

"He has that one ingredient you cannot teach – it's something that you are born with – and that's natural punching power," Kim said. "There's an old adage: 'Punchers are born, they're not made,' and he certainly has that.

"I think he's one of the best prospects in all of boxing. Certainly one of the best under the Golden Boy banner. His hallmark is his ability to kick. He kicks like a mule, and I don't recall a lot of prospects who punch like he does."

While Kim believes Ortiz's upside to be considerable, he stresses a caveat.

"How does he catch? A lot of guys can pitch; can he catch on the chin? Can he develop the other requisite skills such as boxing, maneuver around the ring and work behind the jab?

"It's still very, very early in his career, and a lot of this could be a mirage in terms of the matchmaking and who he's been facing."

However, Kim circles back to Ortiz's power, which reportedly dropped grizzled Argentine veteran Lucas Matthysse in a sparring session.

"Power is something that shines through regardless of matchmaking," he said. "When you talk to people who have worked with him and catch him on the mitts and see how he looks in sparring, he is absolutely a real, legitimate puncher."

Early on in his pro career, Ortiz left home to work with respected trainer Joel Diaz in the Coachella desert area of Southern California. It isn't clear at the moment if that relationship will continue, but the low-key yet self-assured Ortiz expects to be mixing with world-class opposition soon.

"I believe in the next three years, I'll be a world champion," he said. "I'm not going to leave 140 pounds until I get a world title. I'll move up to 147 maybe in a few years. I think I'll max out at 160. It depends how I fill in.

"To me, winning a world title isn't enough. There's a lot of world champions nobody knows about. I want to win maybe more than five if everything goes all right. I want to be known as a legend. When I retire, I don't want people to stop talking about me. I want people to be talking about 'the next Vergil Ortiz.'"

In just his second pro bout, Ortiz appeared on the Canelo Alvarez-Liam Smith undercard and fought in front of several thousand people. The experience gave him a taste of the future he envisions.

"It was very special," Ortiz said. "I actually live five minutes from AT&T Stadium, so pretty much all my friends and family were there to support me and I could hear them in that big stadium.

"I would love to fight a superfight at AT&T, and I believe it would sell out because I have so much support here. Everyone knows me. That is definitely one of the things I'd like to do before I retire."

Ortiz counts his promoter, Oscar De La Hoya, as one of his boxing idols (along with Salvador Sanchez), and the Golden Boy boss seems to be on board with making the young fighter's dream a reality.

"Vergil is destined to be a world champion," said De La Hoya. "He comes from humble roots in Texas and had the courage to leave it all to train in California.

"Vergil has the natural talent and skill that you don't find every day in boxing prospects. His talent speaks for itself inside the ring, with none of his fights going to the final bell. It is a privilege as a promoter to see him continue to grow and make his way to the top – demolishing any fighter that gets in the way of his world championship dreams."

Time will tell, but at this early stage Ortiz passes the eye test. RING

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

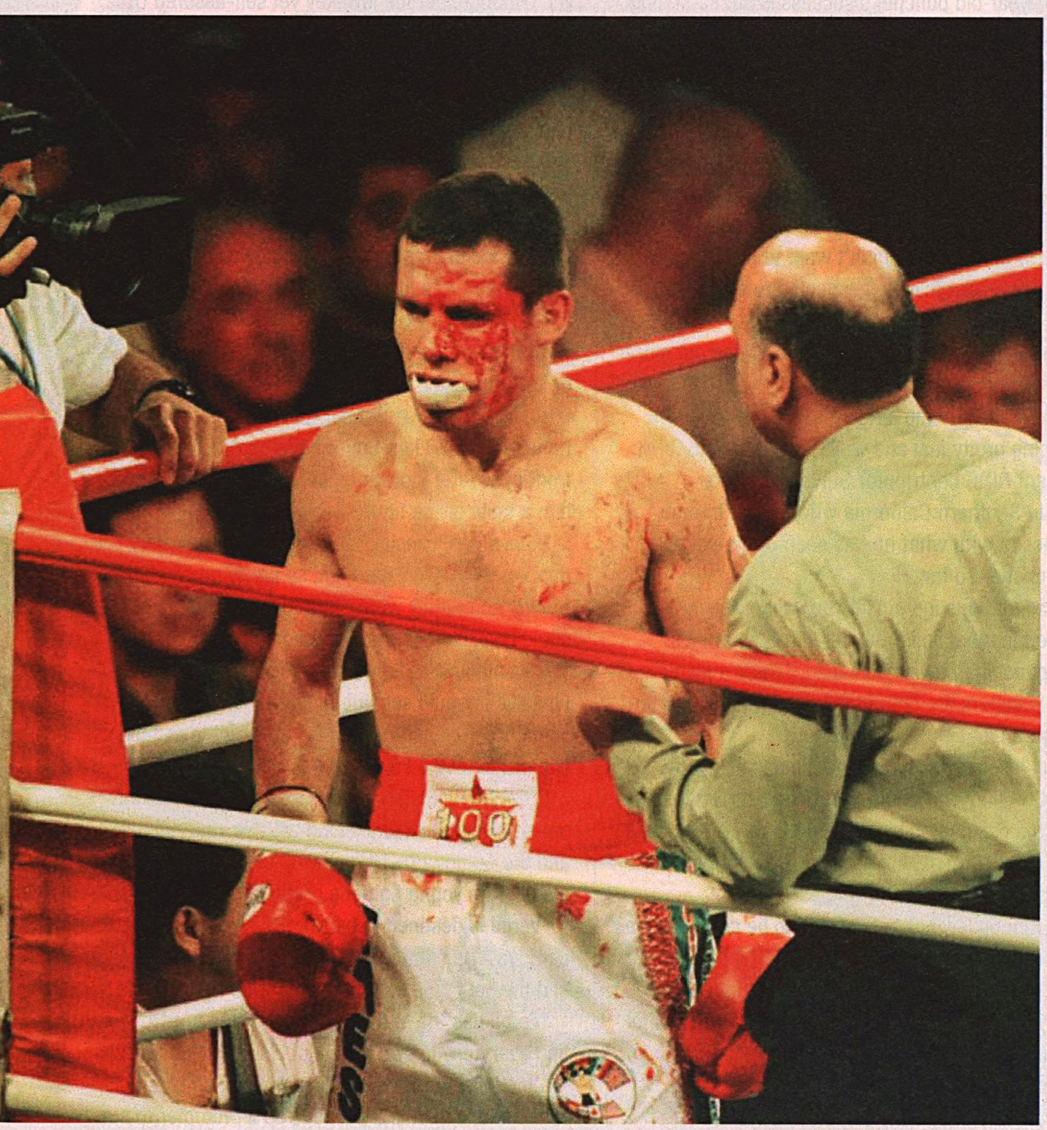
BY THOMAS HAUSER

Muhammad Ali vs. George Foreman was scheduled to take place in Zaire on September 25, 1974. On September 17, Foreman was sparring with Bill McMurray, a 38-year-old journeyman. Raising his arms to defend against a barrage of blows, McMurray accidentally jammed an elbow into George's face, slicing open the skin above Foreman's right eye. The bout was postponed and rescheduled for October 30.

Fast-forward to Caesars Palace on June 7, 1996. Oscar De La Hoya was challenging Julio Cesar Chavez for Chavez's WBC 140-pound title. Early in Round 1, a deep cut opened above Chavez's left eye. In Round 4, the cut necessitated stopping the fight. Afterward, Chavez acknowledged that he'd suffered the cut five days earlier while sparring and had covered it up with makeup during fight week activities. Nevada State Athletic Commission executive director Marc Ratner maintained that the cut had gone undetected during the pre-fight physical examination that the NSAC administered to Chavez.

If a fighter and his camp choose to move forward with a bout despite a cut that hasn't fully healed, the

THICKER THAN WATER



The odds – and Father Time – were decidedly against Julio Cesar Chavez when he defended his WBC 140-pound title against young star Oscar De La Hoya in 1996. Entering the showdown with a five-day-old cut didn't help the aging champion's chances.

JOE MURPHY

governing state athletic commission is charged with determining whether the fight should proceed.

In theory, it's a medical decision. How deep is the cut? Where is the cut? How likely is it that the cut will reopen? Fights aren't stopped because blood is lost. They're stopped because the flow of blood is impairing a fighter's vision or the nature of the cut threatens permanent damage. The magnitude of the fight shouldn't be a determining factor.

But we live in the real world. On one side of the equation is the safety of the fighter, the integrity of the fight and protecting the buying public. On the other side, there are practical considerations. Economics matter.

And while we're at it, is a cut different from a bruised hand? A broken nose? The flu? Manny Pacquiao went into his bout against Floyd Mayweather with a tear in his right rotator cuff.

State athletic commissions respond to economic interests. The Nevada State Athletic Commission is mindful of what the big casinos want. Its primary function is to facilitate bringing big fights to Las Vegas and to regulate them in a manner that's acceptable to the powers that be.

A big fight hasn't been taken down in New York since 1998, when a card headlined by Henry Akinwande vs. Evander Holyfield was canceled after Akinwande tested positive for hepatitis B. But here, one should note, Holyfield-Akinwande was shaping up as a economic disaster, and the New York Daily News reported that Madison Square Garden stood to lose more than a million dollars on the evening because of an overly optimistic financial guarantee.

Greg Sirb is executive director of the Pennsylvania State Athletic Commission and a staunch advocate for fighter safety.

"It's a tough call," Sirb says. "It happens more often than you'd think, particularly with big fights where there's definite pressure to get the fight on. The fighter says, 'I've won before with cuts.' And let's be realistic. It's rare that a fighter goes into a fight at one hundred percent. Fighting hurt is part of boxing. They're like football players in that regard."

And there are other considerations that go beyond the governing commission's deliberative process. Is it the A-side fighter or the B-side fighter who's cut? The A-side fighter can usually afford to pull out. Often, the B-side fighter can't.

If the fight goes forward, should bettors know about the cut? What about the opponent?

Meanwhile, as boxing maven Ron Katz notes, "The fighter should bring a good cutman. That's for sure."

★★★★

The recent death of evangelist Billy Graham conjures up memories of another Billy Graham, who epitomized what boxing was about in an earlier era.

Graham fought professionally from 1941 through 1955. He was undefeated in his first 58 pro fights and, during the course of his ring career, posted victories over Kid Gavilan, Carmen Basilio and Joey Giardello. He was never knocked out and, more remarkably, was never knocked down. His final record stood at 102 wins, 15 losses and nine draws with 27 knockouts. But boxing was different then. Graham never won a world title.

Graham is said to have been the model for Eddie Brown in *The Professional*, W.C. Heinz's novel about boxing. The Hall of Famer also had a way with words and once observed, "If you watch *The Late Show* and it comes up a boxing movie, always bet on the guy who lost the first fourteen rounds. It's the price Hollywood makes him pay for knocking the other guy out in the fifteenth."

★★★★

Randy Roberts is best known to boxing fans as the author of excellent books about Jack Dempsey, Jack Johnson, Joe Louis and Muhammad Ali. His most recent literary effort, written with Johnny Smith, is *A Season in the Sun: The Rise of Mickey Mantle* (Basic Books).

A Season in the Sun focuses on 1956, the year that Mantle led both leagues in batting average, home runs and RBIs and confirmed his greatness. Roberts and Smith offer a vivid portrait of "The Mick" both as he was and as the New York press portrayed him. It's a good read and brings back memories of a conversation I had with Mantle decades ago.

I was researching a biography of Muhammad Ali and wanted to talk with other sports superstars about him. Four baseball players – Ted Williams, Hank Aaron, Reggie Jackson and Mantle – shared memories with me.

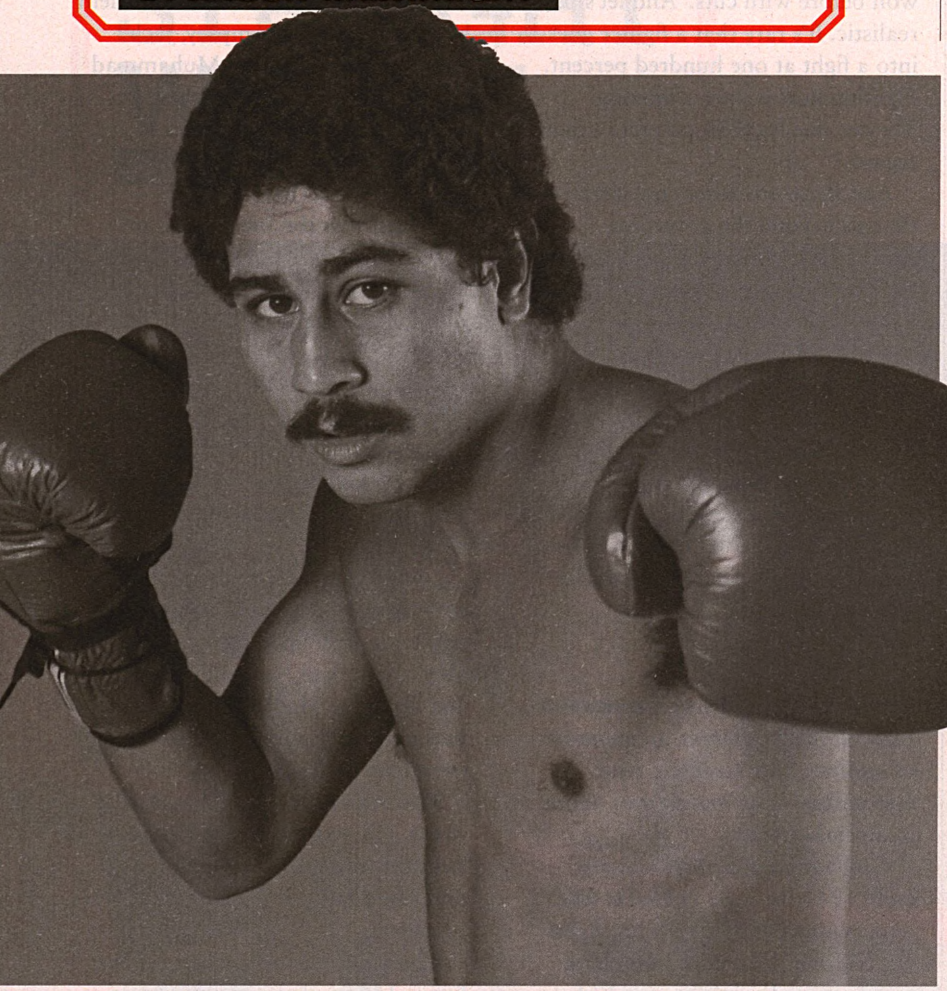
The interview with Mantle was short. He was nursing a hangover and not in a talkative mood. Still, one thing he told me that day bears repeating.

"Do you remember when Ali beat Sonny Liston, that second fight up in Maine?" Mantle reminisced. "We were in Detroit. Half the Yankee team went to a theater where you have to pay to see the fight. [First baseman] Joe Pepitone was with us. We sent him out to get some popcorn. He came back with 10 or 12 sacks, and everyone was leaving. Joe just threw the popcorn up in the air and asked, 'What the hell happened?'"

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thauser@rcn.com. His most recent book – There Will Always Be Boxing – was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism.

BEST I FACED

BY ANSON WAINWRIGHT



WILFREDO GOMEZ

Wilfredo Gomez is the gold standard by which all junior featherweights are measured. Although he won world titles in three weight classes – junior featherweight, featherweight and junior lightweight – it is his body of work at 122 pounds that is legendary. For six years (1977-83) the native of Puerto Rico held the WBC belt and made 17 defenses – all inside the distance – a division record that still stands today.

Born in a poor neighborhood near San Juan, Gomez was a rough-and-tumble kid who naturally gravitated to boxing. He was a very successful amateur, representing his island nation at the 1972 Olympic Games and winning the inaugural World Championships in Havana, Cuba, in 1974.

In demolishing his opponents at the latter competition, the heavy-handed teenager even impressed a certain VIP in attendance.

"Fidel Castro made an offer to stay in Cuba as an amateur," Gomez told THE RING. "I had created a big impression among the Cubans, but I decided to decline because my goal was to become a professional in pursuit of fame, fortune and glory."

"Bazooka" wasn't short of offers and quickly transitioned to the pro style despite a draw in his debut, and in his 17th bout, in mid-1977, he met WBC junior featherweight titleholder Dong Kyun Yum.

The skilled Korean dropped Gomez in the opening round of a competitive fight but was ultimately stopped in the 12th round. Gomez knocked out several challengers – including Royal Kobayashi and Leonardo Cruz – in the following months, setting up a superfight with bantamweight champion Carlos Zarate in the fall of 1978. In a shootout between unbeaten KO artists, Gomez (who had notched 21 KOs in 22 fights) dropped Zarate (who went in with an astounding 51 KOs in 52 bouts) three times before his Mexican rival's corner threw in the towel.

In the midst of his reign, with no obvious challenge at junior featherweight, Gomez elected to face another Mexican legend, Salvador Sanchez, at featherweight in 1981. Gomez endured a tumultuous start in which Sanchez put him on the canvas and broke his cheekbone. The action went back and forth, but Sanchez would not be denied and handed the proud Puerto Rican his first defeat, ending matters in the final minute of the eighth round.

Afterward, Gomez returned to 122 pounds and racked up four more defenses, including an instant classic against Lupe Pintor.

Gomez vacated his 122-pound belt following the Pintor fight

Wilfredo Gomez, who is among the top five greatest boxers from Puerto Rico, is arguably the best junior featherweight in history.

and campaigned at featherweight, where he bested fellow Puerto Rican Juan Laporte for the WBC title. He considers that to be his proudest moment.

"Having lost to Salvador Sanchez at 126 pounds, I decided to try again," he said. "I went well prepared, trained, determined and very focused on winning."

Considering his fierce battles against the Mexican triumvirate of Zarate, Sanchez and Pintor, Gomez is well-qualified to comment on boxing's intense Puerto Rico-Mexico rivalry.

"The rivalry became evident or increased since the Sanchez fight in 1981," he said. "Fans feeling very heated, lots of passion. 'The Battle of the Little Giants' began the big bang of the whole Mexico-vs.-Puerto Rico argument."

Gomez's featherweight tenure was cut short when he lost to burgeoning star Azumah Nelson in December 1984.

He again rebounded, this time at junior lightweight, where he edged Rocky Lockridge over 15 rounds to claim the WBA belt. Despite the controversy of the decision, Gomez considers it to be the best win of his career.

"I had to win that fight," he said. "My goal, my direct mission, was to be a part of a select group of fighters that had won three world championships and become part of the crème de la crème of boxing."

Gomez thought about retiring, but a year later he returned and lost to Alfredo Layne in May 1986. Two years later he resurfaced and won twice before walking away for good with a record of 44-3-1 (42 KOs).

In 1995, Gomez was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

Gomez, now 61, is happily married to his third wife. He has three daughters and four grandchildren.

He graciously took time to speak to THE RING about the best he fought in 10 key categories.

BEST JAB

Carlos Zarate: His left jab was lethal. He was very, very powerful indeed. When he punched, you really felt it. I had to finish him fast and early because his punches were very dangerous and I felt every single one of them. I succeeded because I was well prepared for that fight. I was determined to win and gave it my all.

BEST DEFENSE

Lupe Pintor: Pintor was tough to hit and had a great capacity to take punches. It was like trying to hit a brick wall.

FASTEST HANDS

Salvador Sanchez: He was very fast with his hands and had powerful punches. Fists of steel and the heart of a lion.

BEST FOOTWORK

Sanchez: He had strong legs. He was known for his great stamina and being tireless. He had amazing movement in the ring. Also, Pintor and Dong Kyun Yum had good footwork.

BEST CHIN

Pintor: Pintor had extraordinary punch resistance. He was very well prepared. He had great discipline for our boxing match. Sanchez also had a chin of steel.

SMARTEST

Pintor: He was very clever, just a brilliant fighter. He lasted until the 14th round. His strategy for the fight was to say and sincerely believe that I was going to be his next fatal victim. I was determined to make Pintor eat his threats and show him I was no easy target. I was determined to teach him a boxing lesson.

STRONGEST

Azumah Nelson: Rocky Lockridge, Sanchez, Azumah Nelson, Juan Laporte, Pintor, Zarate, Yum were all strong. Laporte was ultra-strong and durable, but I would say Nelson. He was a very strong and powerful boxer who was in great physical condition.

BEST PUNCHER

Zarate: That is without doubt Carlos Zarate. He was among the greatest punchers of all time. He was a magnificent puncher with both hands. Azumah Nelson was good at taking punches but even better at delivering punches with great force with both hands. Laporte was powerful with both hands, a great counterpuncher and a great right to the body.

BEST BOXING SKILLS

Sanchez: It would be between Sanchez, Zarate and Pintor. Sanchez had a lot of extraordinary qualities – good balance and attacking and defensive qualities. His counterpunching skills were great. Zarate's jabs, crosses, hooks and uppercuts were executed with precision. Pintor is similar to Sanchez – he had good hand- and footwork. It was like fighting myself; he was fiercely competitive. I would pick Sanchez.

BEST OVERALL

Zarate: As a fighter he had it all. He was ambidextrous, punched hard with both hands, he could assimilate punches … he was an astonishing fighter. Also Salvador Sanchez, he was a marathon runner. He had iron lungs, stamina – he was known to be tireless – and he had the ability to mentally focus for a prolonged period of time. He was tough and determined. He relaxed in the ring. Great boxer.

Diana Seville and Christian Giudice helped coordinate and translate this feature. THE RING appreciates their assistance.

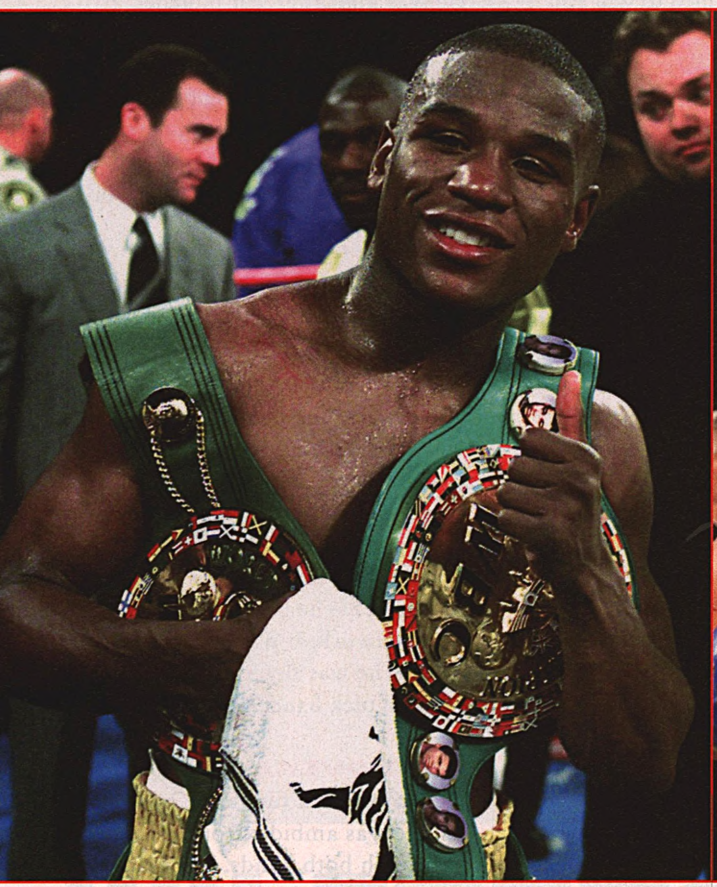
Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

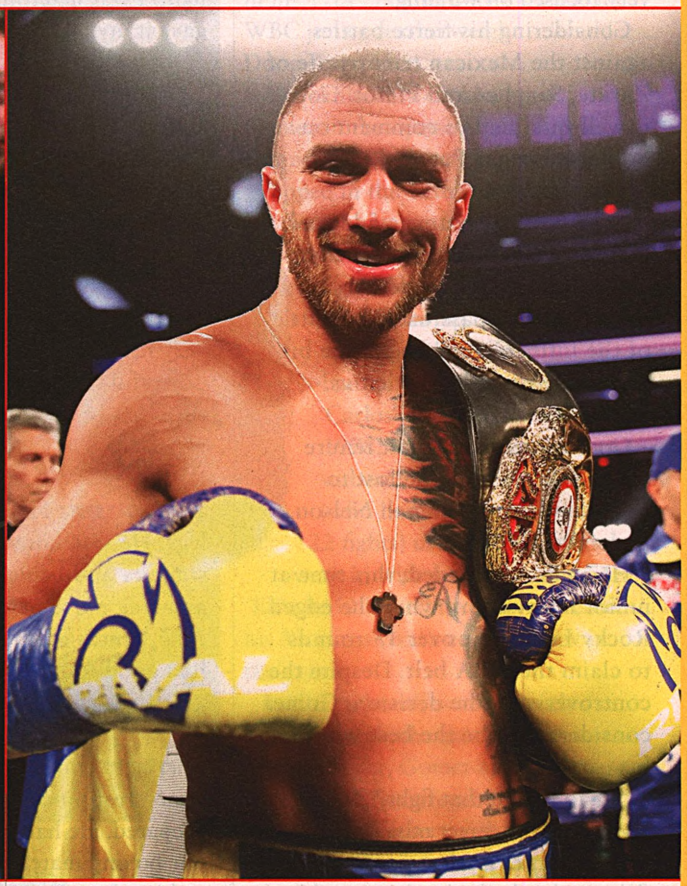
FIGHTS OF FANTASY

BY TOM GRAY

Almost a perfect storm in pugilism.

Floyd Mayweather retired unbeaten as a five-weight world titleholder and raised the bar in terms of earning power. Beyond having the hardware and bank balance, the Michigan native was a tremendously gifted technician with skills to burn. Almost impossible to hit cleanly with more than one blow, Mayweather schooled a myriad of top class opponents throughout a glittering 21-year professional career.





FLOYD MAYWEATHER VS. VASILIY LOMACHENKO

THREE EXPERTS – A FIGHTER, A TRAINER AND A MEDIA MEMBER – TELL YOU HOW A MYTHICAL MATCHUP WOULD PLAY OUT

Vasiliy Lomachenko won 396 of 397 amateur bouts and claimed two Olympic gold medals. As a professional, he has been fast-tracked with incredible success and there appears to be no stopping him. Lomachenko is now a three-weight world titleholder and achieved that in record time, with only 12 fights under his belt. The Ukrainian star has a level of offensive sophistication to match Pernell Whitaker's defense and he is rarely tagged flush.

Would Mayweather be able to solve the style and temper Lomachenko's blazing mix of cerebral aggression with his own counterpunching genius? Or would Lomachenko overwhelm his man and force the habitually untouchable American to come out of his comfort zone and battle for survival?

Three experts give their thoughts on a fantasy fight between two men with astonishing levels of skill and grace. All three contributors were advised that this would be a lightweight contest between a peak version of Mayweather (at the time of his lightweight debut against Jose Luis Castillo in 2002) and today's version of Lomachenko.

MAYWEATHER: JOHN GURZINSKI; LOMACHENKO: MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK

Tom Gray is Associate Editor for THE RING. Follow him on Twitter: @Tom_Gray_Boxing

MAYWEATHER ★ TALE OF THE TAPE ★ LOMACHENKO

LIGHTWEIGHT

MAYWEATHER		LOMACHENKO
25	AGE	30
27-0 (20 KOS)	RECORD	11-1 (9 KOS)
74 PERCENT	KO PERCENTAGE	75 PERCENT
ORTHODOX	STANCE	SOUTHPAW
5 FEET 8 INCHES	HEIGHT	5 FEET 7 INCHES
72 INCHES	REACH	65½ INCHES

FIGHTER

Josh Taylor

RATED NO. 6 BY THE RING AT JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHT

If I'd have gotten to the final of the (London 2012) Olympics, I would have fought Lomachenko, but I had the toughest draw possible (Taylor lost to No. 2-ranked Domenico Valentino in the last 16). I was also meant to fight Lomachenko in the WSB (World Series of Boxing) but damaged my left hand in the fight prior and couldn't box. I was absolutely gutted because I would have loved to have faced him. Lomachenko was great even then. His movement, his agility, his calmness; he never loads up on anything, the angles he creates, the pivots, and the way he transfers his weight – he's brilliant. And he's also defensively switched-on when under attack. At lightweight, Mayweather let his hands go a bit more; he was more on the offense and could be quite vicious. He was great defensively and, again, a lot of that was down to his feet. He didn't move and bounce as quick as Lomachenko, but he'd take tiny steps and create little angles. He'd take a half-step whenever needed and he was very cute – plus he had rapid hands. It's almost impossible to pick a winner, but I'll go with Mayweather. It would be a great fight to watch because Lomachenko would be coming forward and creating angles, but Mayweather would be calm under that pressure.

Prediction: MAYWEATHER

TRAINER

Dave Coldwell

TRAINER OF TONY BELLEW AND JAMIE MCDONNELL

Lomachenko is a fantastic fighter and nobody can argue with that. His timing, his precision, his feet, his distance, his hands – everything about him – he's ticking all the boxes. In this era, he's the man that stands out. After the performance against Linares, you have to say he's the best pound-for-pound fighter in the world right now. Mayweather was more exciting at lightweight; he looked to put on a show, and I think that version of him beats Lomachenko. Floyd was quicker off the mark, sharper and he had pop. He would also hit people with shots that they couldn't see. While Linares is a great fighter, he managed to put Lomachenko over with a right hand, which shows there is a chink in Loma's armor at this weight. Mayweather's straight right hand was very good and he carried real snap as a lightweight. He was rangy with long arms. He was the bigger fighter, and I think his speed and boxing brain would be enough to overcome Lomachenko. The only time Mayweather looked beatable was when his legs got heavier with age. At lightweight his legs were fantastic – fast – he just skipped in and out of range at 135. Also, if you look at the roster of fighters Mayweather faced at the lower weights, the caliber was probably better than what Lomachenko is facing right now.

Prediction: MAYWEATHER

MEDIA

Alex Steedman

PRESENTER/COMMENTATOR FOR BOXNATION IN THE U.K.

Great question. Two special fighters and none quite like either down the years. It depends entirely on which version of Mayweather we're talking about. I enjoyed Floyd at 135 pounds much more than I appreciated him latterly. He was entertaining and a threat as "Pretty Boy" – remember the Phillip Ndou fight? – before morphing into "Money" the defensive genius. The latter version would be fancied to neutralize Lomachenko, picking his punches on his way to a decision win. But at lightweight, Mayweather was definitely beatable, as Castillo's performances underlined. Lomachenko is an extraordinary talent. If you look at boxing history as punctuated by fighters who shaped the sport, changed perceptions or introduced a new style, then the lineage would probably read Jack Johnson, Sugar Ray Robinson, Muhammad Ali, then maybe Ray Leonard. I'd include Lomachenko bringing that list up to date. Mayweather shaped boxing outside the ring, but not in it. Loma has fans on the edge of their seats, shaking their heads and saying, "I've never seen anything like that before." And at 30 years old, Loma is in a hurry – taking chances in fights, taking on all comers, fighting champions at any weight. I think Lomachenko beats the 135-pound version of Mayweather. With his movement, footwork and angles, I'd take Lomachenko to hustle the best of Mayweather by split decision.

Prediction: LOMACHENKO

RATINGS

POUND FOR POUND ★ RATINGS ANALYSIS ★ THE RING RATINGS

Tony Bellew (right) made short work of the shopworn David Haye in their anticipated rematch.

POUND FOR POUND

1 **GENNADY GOLOVKIN**
Kazakhstan • 38-0-1 (34 KOs)

2 **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
Ukraine • 11-1-0 (9 KOs)

3 **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
U.S. • 32-0-0 (23 KOs)

4 **CANELO ALVAREZ**
Mexico • 49-1-2 (34 KOs)

5 **MIKEY GARCIA**
U.S. • 38-0-0 (30 KOs)

6 **SRISASKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
Thailand • 45-4-1 (40 KOs)

7 **NAOYA INOUE**
Japan • 15-0-0 (13 KOs)

8 **ERROL SPENCE JR.**
U.S. • 23-0-0 (20 KOs)

9 **SERGEY KOVALEV**
Russia • 32-2-1 (28 KOs)

10 **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX**
Cuba • 17-1-0 (11 KOs)

POUND FOR POUND: In his first fight as a lightweight, Vasiliy Lomachenko targeted the division champion, weathered his first knockdown and became the first fighter to become a three-division titleholder in just 12 pro fights. Pound-for-pound stuff? If you didn't laugh at that question, turn in your badge and get out. Loma moved from No. 3 to No. 2, just below Gennady Golovkin.

HEAVYWEIGHTS: Kubrat Pulev (No. 7 last month) was removed for inactivity and the man tabbed for the vacancy at No. 10 was Tony Bellew, who one-upped his stoppage of David Haye in their first fight with a true beatdown in the rematch.

CRUISERWEIGHTS: Chicago native Andrew Tabiti stayed undefeated and rose a notch, from No. 10 to No. 9, with a sixth-round knockout of gatekeeper-approaching-journeyman Lateef Kayode.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS: No change.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No change.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Reinvented 154-pounder Kell Brook entered at No. 10 to replace Maciej Sulecki (No. 10 last month), who went up to 160 and put in a very solid effort against Daniel Jacobs. Jaime Munguia stormed into the ratings at No. 4, ousting his victim, Sadam Ali, with a brutal four-knockdown stoppage to seize the belt taken from Miguel Cotto in the 2017 Upset of the Year.

WELTERWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS: Mikey Garcia (No. 1 last month) officially vacated his IBF belt to campaign down at lightweight, so he was removed and the resulting shift made room for Alex Saucedo at No. 10.

LIGHTWEIGHTS: In record time, Lomachenko became a three-division titleholder and RING champion with his 10th-round stoppage

Daniel Jacobs digs a left to the body of Maciej Sulecki, who drops from the 154-pound rankings.

of incumbent champ Jorge Linares. Linares slid into the No. 1 contender position, which pushed No. 10-rated Antonio Lozada Jr. off the list.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS: Lomachenko was emphatic about putting 130 below him, so he was removed from his No. 1 rank and everyone else got a one-notch promotion. Undefeated Russian Evgeny Chuprakov, who we really hope decides to adopt the nickname "Chuprakabra," entered at No. 10.

FEATHERWEIGHTS: Carl Frampton now lurks just below rival Leo Santa Cruz after moving from No. 3 to No. 2 with a vintage boxing performance against Nonito Donaire (unrated) to win a unanimous decision.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS: Jessie Magdaleno (No. 2 last month) put Isaac Dogboe (rated No. 7 at the time) on the canvas in the opening round, but the Ghanaian returned the favor three times in a terrific scrap. Dogboe won by 11th-round knockout, took Magdaleno's title and rose to No. 2 while Magdaleno sank to No. 4.

BANTAMWEIGHTS: Omar Narvaez (No. 10 last month) busted out the clamshell defense and little else in losing a shutout decision to No. 1-rated Zolani Tete. The veteran from Argentina was dismissed from the ratings and undefeated Frenchman Nordine Oubaali entered at No. 10. Another vacancy opened up at No. 10 when No. 9-rated Paul Butler exited after losing a very wide unanimous decision to Emmanuel Rodriguez, who rose from No. 8 to No. 4. The empty spot was grabbed by Australia's Jason Moloney.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS: No change.

FLYWEIGHTS: Daigo Higa (No. 7 last month) was removed after being banned by the Japanese Boxing Commission for weight-related transgressions (see page 56). Everyone formerly below him moved up, and Vincent Legrand was brought in at No. 10.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS: No change.

STRAWWEIGHTS: Leroy Estrada (No. 8 last month) was defeated in the fifth round by No. 1-rated Wanheng Menayothin. The 23-year-old Panamanian dropped out and undefeated Tsubasa Koura, also 23, made his debut at No. 10.

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C (VACANT)
1 ANTHONY JOSHUA
U.K. • 21-0-0 (20 KOs)
2 DEONTAY WILDER
U.S. • 40-0-0 (39 KOs)
3 ALEXANDER POVETKIN
Russia • 34-1-0 (24 KOs)
4 JOSEPH PARKER
New Zealand • 24-1-0 (18 KOs)
5 LUIS ORTIZ
Cuba • 28-1-0 (24 KOs)
6 DILLIAN WHYTE
U.K. • 23-1-0 (17 KOs)
7 DOMINIC BREAZEALE
U.S. • 19-1-0 (17 KOs)
8 JARRELL MILLER
U.S. • 21-0-1 (18 KOs)
9 ADAM KOWNACKI
U.S. • 17-0-0 (14 KOs)
10 TONY BELLEW
U.K. • 30-2-1 (20 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 OLEKSANDR USYK
Ukraine • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)
2 MURAT GASSIEV
Russia • 26-0-0 (19 KOs)
3 MAIRIS BRIEDIS
Latvia • 23-1-0 (18 KOs)
4 DENIS LEBEDEV
Russia • 30-2-0 (22 KOs)
5 YUNIER DORTICOS
Cuba • 22-1-0 (21 KOs)
6 KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI
Poland • 30-1-0 (19 KOs)
7 MAKSIM VLASOV
Russia • 42-2-0 (25 KOs)
8 KEVIN LERENA
S. Africa • 20-1-0 (9 KOs)
9 ANDREW TABITI
U.S. • 16-0-0 (13 KOs)
10 ILUNGA MAKABU
Congo • 21-2-0 (20 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 SERGEY KOVALEV
Russia • 32-2-1 (28 KOs)
2 ADONIS STEVENSON
Canada • 29-1-0 (24 KOs)
3 DMITRY BIVOL
Russia • 13-0-0 (11 KOs)
4 ELEIDER ALVAREZ
Colombia • 23-0-0 (11 KOs)
5 OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK
Ukraine • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)
6 ARTUR BETERBIEV
Russia • 12-0-0 (12 KOs)
7 SULLIVAN BARRERA
Cuba • 21-2-0 (14 KOs)
8 BADOU JACK
Sweden • 22-1-2 (13 KOs)
9 MARCUS BROWNE
U.S. • 21-0-0 (16 KOs)
10 JOE SMITH JR.
U.S. • 23-2-0 (19 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 GEORGE GROVES
U.K. • 28-3-0 (20 KOs)
2 GILBERTO RAMIREZ
Mexico • 37-0-0 (25 KOs)
3 CALLUM SMITH
U.K. • 24-0-0 (17 KOs)
5 DAVID BENAVIDEZ
U.S. • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)
6 JOSE UZCATEGUI
Venezuela • 27-2-0 (23 KOs)
7 JAMES DEGALE
U.K. • 24-2-1 (14 KOs)
8 ANTHONY DIRRELL
U.S. • 32-1-1 (24 KOs)
4 CALEB TRUAX
U.S. • 29-4-2 (18 KOs)
9 CHRIS EUBANK JR.
U.K. • 26-2-0 (20 KOs)
10 JUERGEN BRAEHMER
Germany • 49-3-0 (35 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights of May 13, 2018

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 LBS

- **C** **CANELO ALVAREZ** — Mexico • 49-1-2 (34 KOs)
- **1** **GENNADY GOLOVKIN** — Kaz. • 38-0-1 (34 KOs)
- **2** **DANIEL JACOBS** — U.S. • 34-2-0 (29 KOs)
- **3** **BILLY JOE SAUNDERS** — U.K. • 26-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **4** **SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO** — Ukraine • 12-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **5** **JERMALL CHARLO** — U.S. • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **6** **RYOTA MURATA** — Japan • 14-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **7** **DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** — U.S. • 25-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **8** **DAVID LEMIEUX** — Canada • 38-4-0 (33 KOs)
- **9** **HASSAN N'DAM** — Cameroon • 36-3-0 (21 KOs)
- **10** **GARY O'SULLIVAN** — Ireland • 28-2-0 (20 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 LBS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **JARRETT HURD** — U.S. • 22-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **2** **JERMELL CHARLO** — U.S. • 30-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **3** **ERISLANDY LARA** — Cuba • 25-3-2 (14 KOs)
- **4** **JAIME MUNGUIA** — Mexico • 29-0-0 (25 KOs)
- **5** **BRIAN CASTANO** — Argentina • 15-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **6** **LIAM SMITH** — U.K. • 26-1-1 (14 KOs)
- **7** **AUSTIN TROUT** — U.S. • 31-4-0 (17 KOs)
- **8** **MICHEL SORO** — France • 32-2-1 (21 KOs)
- **9** **JULIAN WILLIAMS** — U.S. • 25-1-1 (15 KOs)
- **10** **KELL BROOK** — U.K. • 37-2-0 (26 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 LBS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **KEITH THURMAN** — U.S. • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **2** **ERROL SPENCE** — U.S. • 23-0-0 (20 KOs)
- **3** **SHAWN PORTER** — U.S. • 28-2-1 (17 KOs)
- **4** **DANNY GARCIA** — U.S. • 34-1-0 (20 KOs)
- **5** **JEFF HORN** — Australia • 18-0-1 (12 KOs)
- **6** **MANNY PACQUIAO** — Phil. • 59-7-2 (38 KOs)
- **7** **JESSIE VARGAS** — U.S. • 28-2-1 (10 KOs)
- **8** **LUCAS MATTHYSSE** — Argentina • 39-4-0 (36 KOs)
- **9** **EGIDIJUS KAVALIAUSKAS** — Lithuania • 19-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **10** **YORDENIS UGAS** — Cuba • 21-3-0 (10 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 LBS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **REGIS PROGRAIS** — U.S. • 21-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **2** **VIKTOR POSTOL** — Ukraine • 29-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **3** **KIRYL RELIKH** — Belarus • 22-2-0 (19 KOs)
- **4** **JOSE RAMIREZ** — U.S. • 22-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **5** **ANTONIO OROZCO** — U.S. • 27-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **6** **JOSH TAYLOR** — U.K. • 12-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **7** **EDUARD TROYANOVSKY** — Russia • 27-1-0 (24 KOs)
- **8** **SERGEY LIPINETS** — Russia • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **9** **IVAN BARANCHYK** — Russia • 18-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **10** **ALEX SAUCEDO** — U.S. • 27-0-0 (17 KOs)

Gennady Golovkin (left) needed only two rounds to stop late-sub Vanes Martirosyan on May 5.

Jermall Charlo (right) used a brutal finishing combo on Hugo Centeno Jr. to put himself in position to challenge Gennady Golovkin.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 LBS

- **C** **VASYL LOMACHENKO** — Ukraine • 11-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **1** **JORGE LINARES** — Venezuela • 44-4-0 (27 KOs)
- **2** **MIKEY GARCIA** — U.S. • 38-0-0 (30 KOs)
- **3** **ROBERT EASTER** — U.S. • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **4** **RAYMUNDO BELTRAN** — Mexico • 35-7-1 (21 KOs)
- **5** **RICHARD COMMEY** — Ghana • 26-2-0 (23 KOs)
- **6** **ANTHONY CROLLA** — U.K. • 33-6-3 (13 KOs)
- **7** **LUKE CAMPBELL** — U.K. • 18-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **8** **DEJAN ZLATICANIN** — Montenegro • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **9** **YVAN MENDY** — France • 40-4-1 (19 KOs)
- **10** **JAVIER FORTUNA** — Dom. Rep. • 33-2-1 (23 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 LBS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **MIGUEL BERCHELT** — Mexico • 33-1-0 (29 KOs)
- **2** **GERVONTA DAVIS** — U.S. • 20-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **3** **ALBERTO MACHADO** — P.R. • 19-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **4** **FRANCISCO VARGAS** — Mexico • 25-1-2 (18 KOs)
- **5** **TEVIN FARMER** — U.S. • 25-4-1 (5 KOs)
- **6** **MIGUEL ROMAN** — Mexico • 59-12-0 (46 KOs)
- **7** **JEZREEL CORRALES** — Panama • 22-2-0 (8 KOs)
- **8** **JHONNY GONZALEZ** — Mexico • 66-10-0 (54 KOs)
- **9** **CHRISTOPHER DIAZ** — Puerto Rico • 23-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **10** **EVGENY CHUPRAKOV** — Russia • 19-0-0 (10 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 LBS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **LEO SANTA CRUZ** — U.S. • 34-1-1 (19 KOs)
- **2** **CARL FRAMPTON** — U.K. • 25-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **3** **GARY RUSSELL JR.** — U.S. • 28-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **4** **OSCAR VALDEZ** — Mexico • 24-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **5** **LEE SELBY** — U.K. • 26-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **6** **ABNER MARES** — Mexico • 31-2-1 (15 KOs)
- **7** **JOSEPH DIAZ JR.** — U.S. • 26-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **8** **JESUS ROJAS** — P.R. • 26-1-2 (19 KOs)
- **9** **JOSH WARRINGTON** — U.K. • 26-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **10** **SCOTT QUIGG** — U.K. • 34-2-2 (25 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 LBS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX** — Cuba • 17-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **2** **ISAAC DOGBOE** — Ghana • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **3** **REY VARGAS** — Mexico • 32-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **4** **JESSIE MAGDALENO** — U.S. • 25-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **5** **DANIEL ROMAN** — U.S. • 24-2-1 (9 KOs)
- **6** **DIEGO DE LA HOYA** — Mexico • 20-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **7** **MOISES FLORES** — Mexico • 25-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **8** **RYOSUKE IWASA** — Japan • 25-2-0 (16 KOs)
- **9** **JULIO CEJA** — Mexico • 32-2-0 (28 KOs)
- **10** **TOMOKI KAMEDA** — Japan • 35-2-0 (20 KOs)

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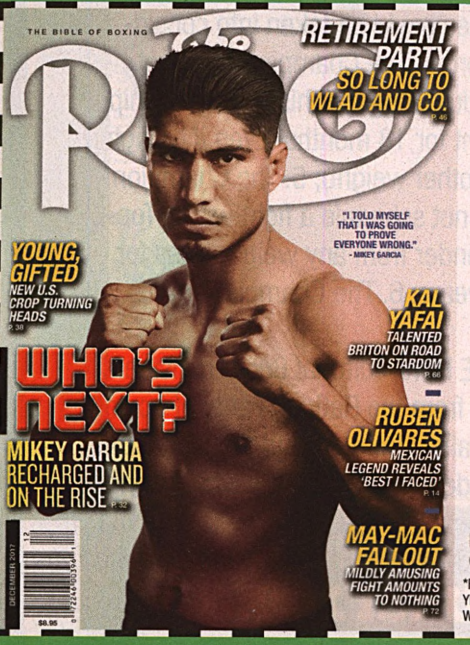

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RATINGS

Through fights of May 13, 2018

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 ZOLANI TETE
S. Africa • 27-3-0 (21 KOs)
2 JAMIE MCDONNELL
U.K. • 29-2-1 (13 KOs)
3 RYAN BURNETT
U.K. • 19-0-0 (9 KOs)
4 EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ
P.R. • 18-0-0 (12 KOs)
5 JUAN CARLOS PAYANO
Dom. Rep. • 20-1-0 (9 KOs)
6 ZHANAT ZHAKIYANOV
Kaz. • 27-2-0 (18 KOs)
7 LIBORIO SOLIS
Venezuela • 26-5-1 (12 KOs)
8 LEE HASKINS
U.K. • 35-4-0 (14 KOs)
9 NORDINE OUBAALI
France • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)
10 JASON MOLONEY
Australia • 16-0-0 (13 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 LBS

C SRISASKET SOR RUNGVISAI
Thailand • 45-4-1 (40 KOs)
1 NAOYA INOUE
Japan • 15-0-0 (13 KOs)
2 JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA
Mexico • 36-3-0 (25 KOs)
3 KHALID YAFAI
U.K. • 23-0-0 (14 KOs)
4 JERWIN ANCAJAS
Phil. • 29-1-1 (20 KOs)
5 RAU'SHEE WARREN
U.S. • 16-2-0 (4 KOs)
6 ROMAN GONZALEZ
Nicaragua • 46-2-0 (38 KOs)
7 MCWILLIAMS ARROYO
Puerto Rico • 17-3-0 (14 KOs)
8 CARLOS CUADRAS
Mexico • 36-3-1 (27 KOs)
9 JONAS SULTAN
Phil. • 14-3-0 (9 KOs)
10 REX TSO
China • 22-0-0 (13 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 ARTEM DALAKIAN
Ukraine • 16-0-0 (11 KOs)
2 MORUTI MTHALANE
S. Africa • 35-2-0 (24 KOs)
3 ANDREW SELBY
U.K. • 10-0-0 (5 KOs)
4 CRISTOFER ROSALES
Nicaragua • 27-3-0 (18 KOs)
5 SHO KIMURA
Japan • 16-1-2 (9 KOs)
6 KOSEI TANAKA
Japan • 11-0-0 (7 KOs)
7 MASAYUKI KURODA
Japan • 29-7-3 (16 KOs)
8 FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.
Mexico • 27-4-1 (19 KOs)
9 MUHAMMAD WASEEM
Pakistan • 8-0-0 (6 KOs)
10 VINCENT LEGRAND
France • 27-0-0 (16 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 LBS

C RYOICHI TAGUCHI
Japan • 27-2-2 (12 KOs)
1 KEN SHIRO
Japan • 12-0-0 (6 KOs)
2 MILAN MELINDO
Phil. • 37-3-0 (13 KOs)
3 CARLOS CANIZALES
Venezuela • 20-0-1 (16 KOs)
4 PEDRO GUEVARA
Mexico • 30-3-1 (17 KOs)
5 GANIGAN LOPEZ
Mexico • 29-7-0 (18 KOs)
6 HEKKIE BUDLER
S. Africa • 31-3-0 (10 KOs)
7 FELIX ALVARADO
Nicaragua • 33-2-0 (29 KOs)
8 AKIRA YAEGASHI
Japan • 26-6-0 (14 KOs)
9 ANGEL ACOSTA
P.R. • 17-1-0 (17 KOs)
10 REY LORETO
Phil. • 24-14-0 (16 KOs)

Zolani Tete had to settle for a shutout decision against Omar Narvaez in a dreadfully boring bantamweight title bout.

Still in rebuilding mode, Rau'shee Warren (right) took a stay-busy fight against Juan Medina on the Davis-Cuellar undercard.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 WANHENG MENAYOTHIN
Thailand • 50-0-0 (18 KOs)
2 KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART
Thailand • 17-0-0 (7 KOs)
3 HIROTO KYOGUCHI
Japan • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)
4 RYUYA YAMANAKA
Japan • 16-2-0 (5 KOs)
4 BYRON ROJAS
Nicaragua • 24-3-3 (10 KOs)
5 JOSE ARGUMEDO
Mexico • 21-4-1 (13 KOs)
7 SIMPHIWE KHONCO
S. Africa • 18-5-0 (7 KOs)
8 CARLOS BUITRAGO
Nicaragua • 30-3-1 (17 KOs)
9 TATSUYA FUKUHARA
Japan • 20-6-6 (7 KOs)
10 TSUBASA KOURA
Japan • 13-0-0 (9 KOs)

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RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. THE RING's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the RING title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

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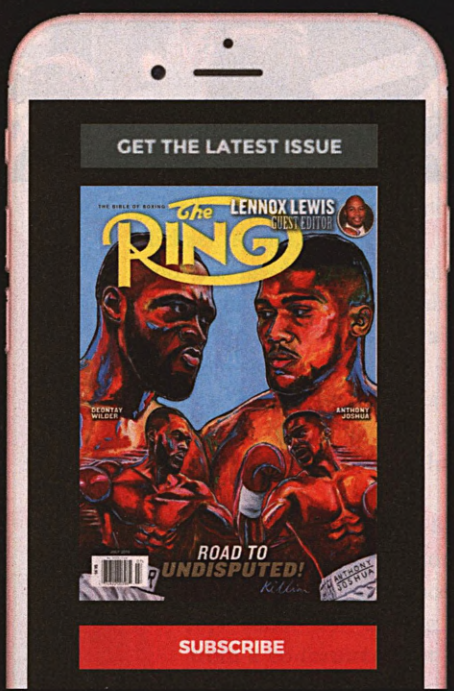

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Does Manny Pacquiao have one more high-performance victory in him? And if he defeats the dangerous Lucas Matthysse, will he continue to fight into his 40s?

THE LONG GOODBYE

IT SEEMS LIKE MANNY PACQUIAO HAS BEEN RETIRING FOR YEARS, BUT LUCAS MATTHYSSE MIGHT ONLY BE A DOOR TO YET ANOTHER CHAPTER

By **Ryan Songalia**

Standing in the middle of a Brisbane ring, blood streaming from his forehead, bewildered by a decision no one thought he could lose is not the way anyone envisioned Manny Pacquiao's boxing career ending.

You'd have plenty of company if you thought Pacquiao deserved a victory over Jeff Horn, but also felt the Filipino legend wasn't the same Pacquiao who had regained the WBO welterweight title from Jessie Vargas just a year earlier. No one would have faulted Pacquiao if he decided to walk off into the life of politics and late-night basketball games he has settled into in recent years. Perhaps it's time for him to speak of boxing only in the past tense – that gig that had made the streets of the Philippines deserted on Sunday mornings as his countrymen gathered around screens to watch his fights.

Yet here he is, a few months shy of his 40th birthday, returning to the ring for the latest stop in a protracted farewell tour, facing Lucas Matthysse on July 15 (July 14 in the U.S.) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Just like a rock band several decades into its run, Team Pacquiao has undergone personnel changes. Freddie Roach, the guru whose star rose alongside Pacquiao's since they first linked up in 2001, was replaced as chief second by Buboy Fernandez, Pacquiao's longtime assistant and childhood best friend. Nonito Donaire Sr., the father of another multiple-division champion and fellow General Santos City native, has also joined the team to assist Pacquiao.

After 23 years as a pro, Pacquiao listens to his instincts in the gym and on fight night more than anyone else's, but the manner in which the split played out left some bitterness with Roach, who admitted to being "hurt" after hearing he had been let go through a press release (which Pacquiao later said he had not authorized).

Pacquiao attempted to smooth matters over by initially saying the decision wasn't final, and if they did split, it wouldn't necessarily be permanent.

"I'm still not closing the door with Freddie. We still want to try and (have Buboy) handle this one fight and, after that, go back to Freddie," Pacquiao said at the kick-off press conference in Manila.

"What Manny's trying to do is, he knows we're gonna have one or two more fights and he wants to set Buboy up, his longtime boyhood friend," said Michael Koncz, Pacquiao's adviser and the head of MP Promotions. "He figures if he gives Buboy the opportunity being the trainer, if they're successful, once Manny retires Buboy will be able to continue on with his boxing training with a stable of his own fighters. Simple as that."

Pacquiao is also calling his own shots now as lead promoter. He asserted his independence from Top Rank by turning away from a co-featured spot on the Horn-Terence Crawford show, rejecting Top Rank's relatively safe hand-picked opponent,

Mike Alvarado, and working with Golden Boy Promotions to secure the more viable Matthysse.

Though both sides dispute whether they are contractually tied for future fights, Top Rank's involvement with the show is only in distributing the fight on pay-per-view through its deal with ESPN. It was Pacquiao's MP Promotions that secured funding from an investor to bring the show to Kuala Lumpur, which hasn't seen a significant boxing event since Muhammad Ali fought Joe Bugner for the second time in 1975.

"We chose Matthysse...because I believe he has guts," said Pacquiao (59-7-2, 38 knockouts). "He is an aggressive fighter, and he can create more action in the ring than the fight that I had before."

Matthysse (39-4, 36 KOs) represents a "why not?" sort of matchup that is likely to be entertaining to watch. He was in THE RING's Fight of the Year in 2014 against John Molina and has the sort of right-hand power that can keep a fight suspenseful for as long as it lasts. He's also a fighter who, at 35, isn't going to overwhelm Pacquiao with youth and is two fights removed from a knockout loss to Viktor Postol.

Still, Matthysse and his team expressed confidence that this would be a career-defining victory that validates the Argentine as a star after years of falling just short in big fights.

"This is Matthysse's time now. Manny Pacquiao's time is over and we're gonna win the fight," said Mario Arano, Matthysse's manager.

"Obviously, (Pacquiao) is still a great fighter, but since the knockout (loss) to (Juan Manuel) Marquez (in 2012), I think that he's not the same fighter and he's not in his prime anymore," Matthysse added.

It's clear to all involved that Pacquiao isn't the same fighter he was when he tore through Marco Antonio Barrera and Erik Morales with his nonstop punch barrage, and he may not have separated anyone from their senses with one shot like he did to Ricky Hatton nearly 10 years ago. But the only fighter to ever win world-title recognition in eight weight classes is still good enough to hang with top fighters. And even though he's been in some of the most damaging fights of this century, he hasn't shown that he is any more vulnerable than his younger peers.

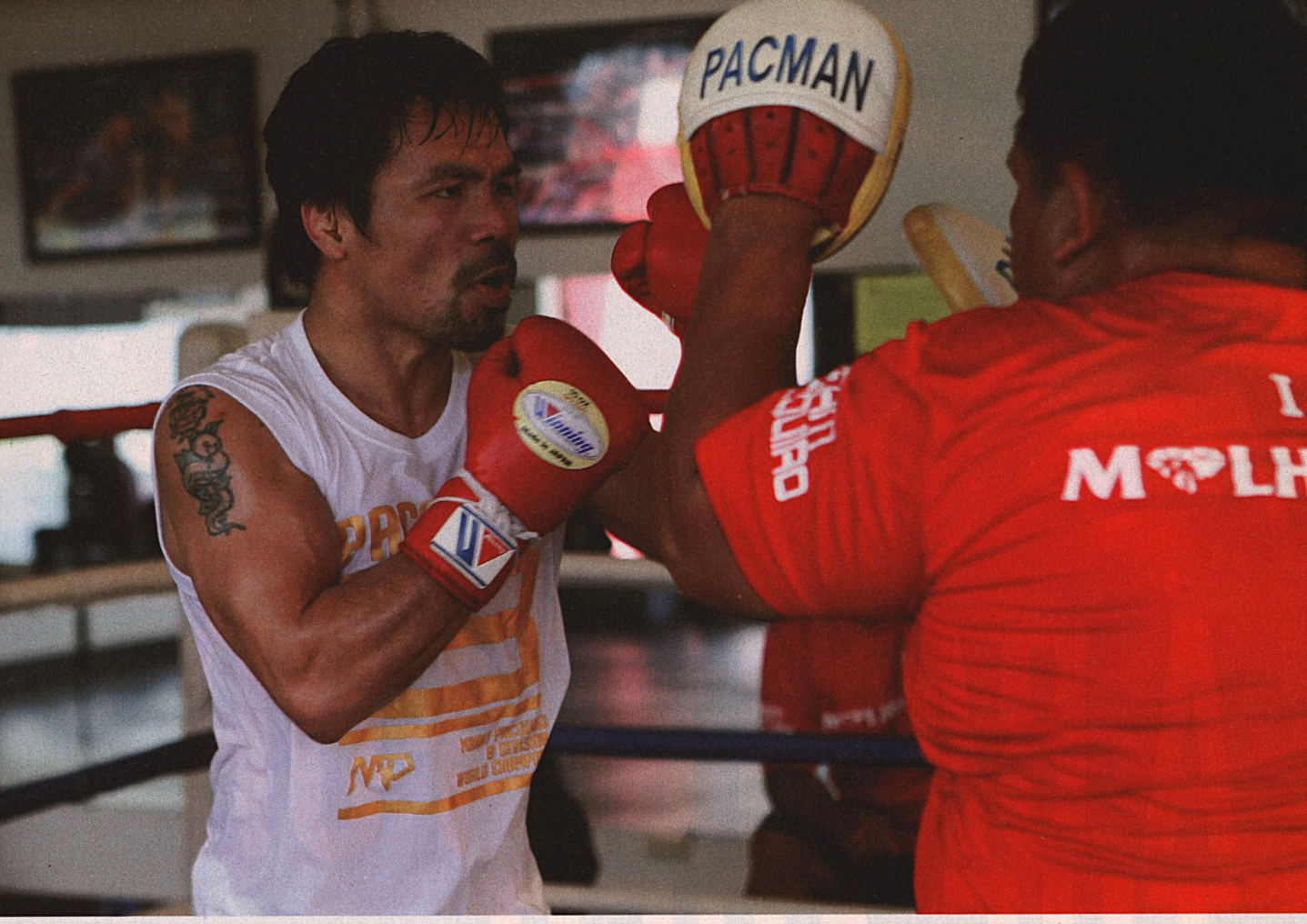
Yet with no other mountains to scale in the sport, what is it that keeps him coming back to be subjected to the fists and head clashes of younger foes? Other than a brief "retirement" after his third fight with Timothy Bradley when he was pursuing the seat in the Philippine Senate he now holds, he has shown no inclination that he is considering ending his career.

"My time is not done yet," he responded defiantly to Team Matthysse.

Part of the reason he returns is the distance he keeps from the sport when he doesn't have a fight date on the calendar. He isn't constantly in the gym getting

Many question if 39-year-old Manny Pacquiao still has the drive and ability to compete at the world-class level.

JEOFFREY MAITEM/GETTY IMAGES



Manny Pacquiao works mitts with Buboy Fernandez, who will serve as his trainer for the Lucas Matthysse fight. His decision to part ways with Freddie Roach (at least for one bout) sparked as many headlines as the making of the Matthysse fight.

pounded on by sparring partners, and he maintains his conditioning between fights on the basketball court.

"When we don't have a fight or training camp, he doesn't watch boxing, he doesn't have any boxing equipment around him," said Koncz. "It's totally out of his mind so once or twice a year, it rejuvenates him and he gives it everything he has."

And in truth, Pacquiao is still a valuable commodity to the sport. Any fighter who can convince Malaysian investors to front the money for the country's first major boxing event in almost 50 years is always one win away from being a bankable draw again. Pacquiao remains a universally recognizable name, one of the sport's few remaining ones since Floyd Mayweather Jr.'s latest retirement. And he can still command seven-figure paydays, providing incentive to keep the show going.

And while Pacquiao has lost a step, he's still a step ahead of many of his contemporaries. As Bradley told one YouTube interviewer recently: "Pac's B-game and C-game is still a lot better than a lot of people's A-game."

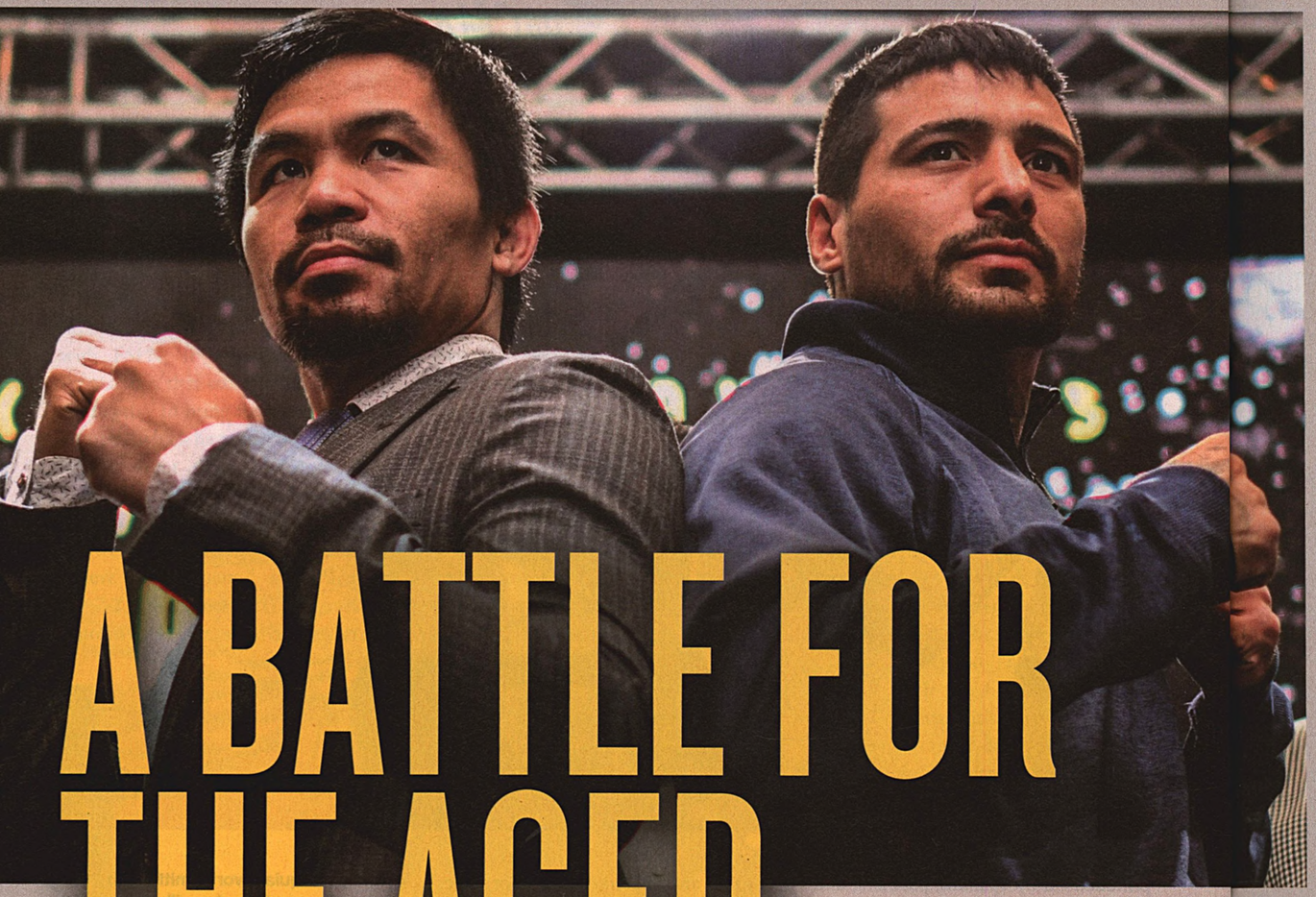
What he does next if he beats Matthysse depends on how well Pacquiao's first event as his own lead promoter goes. He could use Malaysia as a model for what his company can do and shop events to other countries in Southeast Asia or the Middle East, where he tried unsuccessfully to bring a fight against Amir Khan last year. With Mayweather more interested in hitting the beaches of Palawan, Philippines, than having coffee in GenSan to discuss a rematch, a fight with the ultra-smooth Vasiliy Lomachenko is at the top of Pacquiao's wish list as a second option.

Lomachenko, who is promoted by Top Rank, recently made a foray into the 135-pound division and is now the RING and WBA lightweight champion after a 10th-round stoppage of Jorge Linares.

Pacquiao would have to meet him in the middle at 140 pounds for the Lomachenko fight to happen, but junior welterweight is a more natural weight for the future Hall of Famer anyway. There, he wouldn't have to deal with the physicality of much bigger men like Horn, though he'd have to deal with quicker fighters, which could be tougher to deal with as he gets older. It'd also mean he'd be a division below Crawford, whose style could present problems similar to those he experienced with Mayweather.

Pacquiao is either beginning the last chapter of his career or is already several pages in. If he has an endgame for when he can say he's had enough of fighting, he's keeping that close to his heart.

"Hanging gloves up, I don't know yet," said Pacquiao. "But in my life, I never think negative. I always think positive."



A BATTLE FOR THE AGED

WHETHER YOU CALL **PACQUIAO-MATTHYSSE** THE CROSSROADS OR THE END OF THE ROAD, IT'LL SHOWCASE TWO OF BOXING'S MOST BELOVED COMBATANTS

By **Steve Kim**

Manny Pacquiao and Lucas Matthysse pose during the kick-off press conference (in Manila, Philippines) for their July showdown.

In the immediate aftermath of Lucas Matthysse's eighth-round stoppage of Tewa Kiram on January 27 at The Forum in Inglewood, California, the Argentine had a list of fighters whom he yearned to fight next. First and foremost was Manny Pacquiao.

A bout with "Pac-Man" seemed highly unlikely given that the Philippines legend was still tenuously promoted by Top Rank – which had just signed an an exclusive deal with ESPN – and that it had been a while since Top Rank and Golden Boy Promotions (Matthysse's promoter) had worked together on a major fight.

But as Pacquiao and his representatives were working to carve out a deal that would see his next fight in the exotic locale of Malaysia, an unlikely phone call was made to the Golden Boy offices.

Eric Gomez, the president of GBP, recalled: "Mike Koncz (Pacquiao's longtime adviser) reached out to me, 'Hey, are you guys serious about doing the fight? Would you guys be interested in fighting outside the country?' So I said, 'No problem. Give me the details and I'll go from there.'"

What still needed to be clarified at that stage was Pacquiao's relationship with Top Rank and if there were any other entanglements attached to the deal. Eventually, Top Rank agreed to step aside for this event and agreed to take care of the pay-per-view distribution alongside ESPN on July 14 (July 15 in Malaysia). "It took some time. We discussed it. We went back and forth over the officials and this and that and finally we got it done," said Gomez of the matchup, which will take place at the Axiata Arena in Kuala Lumpur.

Matthysse-Pacquiao is a pairing of two of the most respected, popular and crowd-pleasing boxers of the past generation. But it's also one that features a 35-year-old veteran (Matthysse) against a 39-year-old future Hall of Famer.

This isn't necessarily a bad thing. There is a boxing theory that aged fighters with their dulled reflexes sometimes make for better fights, especially if they are facing those at a similar stage of their own career.

"It depends," said Bob Arum, who has promoted a few high-profile fights featuring two fading veterans, including the 1989 rematch between Ray Leonard and Thomas Hearns. "I think the fight will be entertaining because both are aggressive fighters and neither of them are defensive fighters, so it should be a good scrap. But that doesn't mean that because they don't have the ability and speed that they once had, that they won't be able to avoid punches."

When asked if he saw similarities between Matthysse-Pacquiao and Hearns-Leonard II, Arum answered bluntly, "No. Because Tommy and Ray when they fought, they were still really hard outs. Tommy had fought (James) Kinchen and Ray had fought (Donny) Lalonde. They were not necessarily at the end of their careers. They were active fighters. With Matthysse and Manny, they are certainly not at the level they once were."

Fights of this nature are part of the sport's tradition.

Longtime boxing observer Larry Merchant noted, "If you think of some of the great champions who held onto titles long after their primes, although there weren't as many titles in the old days, now everybody who fights into their 30s is a former champion." And when asked for a matchup from the past that reminded him of this upcoming bout, he recalled when Sugar Ray Robinson fought Carmen Basilio in 1957 and 1958: "They were both past their primes. That would be one that would jump into my mind because they were the first two big fights that I covered.

"Robinson was already into his 30s, he had already come out of one retirement and Basilio had moved up to middleweight. And you have to understand that what 35 is today is not what 35 was back in the day when there were so many fighters," continued Merchant, alluding to the relative inactivity of today's boxers. "By the time you reached 28 or 29, people were saying, 'You're almost 30.' And that was almost like an end-of-the-line time."

Robinson and Basilio split two grueling 15-round title bouts, which earned back-to-back Fight of the Year awards from THE RING. Merchant is also reminded of other late-stage meetings – such as the 2010 rematch between Bernard Hopkins and Roy Jones, and the third go-around between Leonard and Roberto Duran in 1989 – which weren't nearly as dramatic.

This is Pacquiao's first outing since getting upset by Jeff Horn last July in Australia in a fight most pundits believed he won. But it's clear that the man in Brisbane wasn't a vintage Pacquiao.

"I thought there was a big drop-off from when I had seen him with Jessie Vargas (in his previous bout, which took place in November 2016)," admitted Arum. But this decline has been steady the past several years. Coupled with age is his political career in the Philippines.

"Obviously he's approaching 40. He's not devoting himself to boxing," said Arum. "He has political work that he's doing; he's a senator. It takes up a lot of his time and effort. So it's not like a Ray Leonard or Tommy Hearns who did not have – at that point – other careers. They were still professional fighters. Manny Pacquiao is a professional fighter when he wants to be, but he has another career which is more time-consuming than boxing."

Clouding the issue is that Pacquiao has decided to part ways with longtime trainer Freddie Roach; instead, it will be Buboy Fernandez preparing him for this latest assignment. No such distractions exist with Matthysse and Joel Diaz, who expects a better version of "The Machine" than the one who recently performed.

"Every fight is a different fight, and Lucas was not as motivated to fight Kiram (as he is to fight) Manny Pacquiao, who's obviously one of the best fighters in boxing history," said Diaz. "And I think every boxer elevates to the level of opposition. Lucas Matthysse, knowing that he's fighting a Manny Pacquiao, it's a different story, a different level. He's going to step it up."

For Matthysse, whose career has fallen just short of being a great one, a victory over a legendary name would be huge – and not just for him. Diaz says that Matthysse told him, "Coach, I'm taking this to Argentina. I'm knocking him out."

For Pacquiao, beating Matthysse would be just another victory against a very good fighter. But for Matthysse, a win would change the way many look at his entire career.

"Anytime a fighter beats a guy who's considered a great fighter, whether he's past his prime or not, that fight for that fighter, it's important," said Merchant. "I don't question that at all. The great champions are remembered as if they are frozen in time at their best."

"I'm going to say this right now," said an emboldened Gomez, who accompanied his client during the press tour for this fight in Asia, "Lucas is going to win the fight. Lucas has dreamt about this. This is his big fight, even bigger than the Danny Garcia fight. This is the fight that he's always wanted; he's looked forward to it, he's dreamt about it. His total focus was on Pacquiao. He wanted to fight Pacquiao and this is his dream come true.

"For Manny, he sees Lucas as just another opponent. And I think that's a mistake."

MOHD RASFAN

ARGENTINE SON

THE BOXING TRADITION OF HIS FAMILY NAME AND THE LOVE OF A COUNTRY WILL BE BEHIND **LUCAS MATTHYSSE** WHEN HE MEETS MANNY PACQUIAO IN MALAYSIA

By **Diego Morilla**

His father was a fighter. His sister was a world champion. His older brother was a top-10 contender and one of the most feared punchers of his division. You can even add his mother and her brother, his brother-in-law, and also his nephew to the list of former fighters in the family.

And yet when you ask Lucas Matthysse who was his most important teacher, the name of only one implacable, relentless relative comes to mind: Father Time.

"I've been training since I was 11 years old, and I have learned from everyone," says Matthysse, now 35 and training for the biggest fight of his life against future first-ballot Hall of Famer Manny Pacquiao on July 15 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. "But I developed my own things, too. I don't have to demonstrate anything to anyone. I have to prove only to myself that I am up to the challenge, and I will do it by having the best preparation I can have." »

Matthysse finally earned some "world title" hardware nearly 14 years into his often hard-luck pro career when he knocked out Tewa Kiram in January.

That preparation began in earnest under the watch of his father, Mario, but developed even further when he ran away at the tender age of 14 to join fellow runaway dreamer Marcos Maidana. They lived in the back of a grocery store in the town of Vera, in the desolate northeast corner of the province of Santa Fe, training under the sun on a heavy bag that the two kids would take in the back of a truck while delivering produce to nearby towns. They would hang the heavy bag on trees around the countryside to learn the trade that would later make them millionaires.

Those hard years, vividly documented in some of his many tattoos, are the reason why Matthysse never seems to understand questions that include words such as "pressure," "mindset," and "psychological state." For him, the game is still the same as it was back then: Train, sweat and fight like this is your last chance to make it out of the sweltering back room in which you are trying to survive.

"The psychological aspect ... I always hear that I am not right in the head, and I don't understand it," Matthysse told THE RING when questioned about the peaks and valleys of his mental game, visible as much in his devastating loss against Viktor Postol as in his demolition of John Molina. "I don't like losing, just like anyone, and that's why sometimes I feel down, but I never get why they ask me about my psychological state or anything like that. You either win or lose fights, and you cope with that as best you can."

Coping with a defeat in a country that is known for being brutal to its losers could prove to be a life-defining moment for Matthysse and his career. Soccer player Gonzalo Higuain knows this. Missing a scoring opportunity in the World Cup has overshadowed every one of his titles and made him the subject of thousands of memes that still plague him today. And that's just one example.

The cruelest part is that only a person who has had great success can experience such a turnaround. Victory brings its own risks, according to one of Matthysse's former sparring partners, who is himself very familiar with the highs and lows of boxing.

"Lucas is about to explode here in Argentina," said Sergio Martinez, the former middleweight champion who caused quite an explosion of his own during his heyday. "But Lucas is a very quiet guy. He will have to learn to accept what's coming. Depending on the result he could have a lot of popularity, and it could be massive and difficult to overcome. If he beats Pacquiao, the changes to his life will be tremendous. He will have to learn how to accept that, because not everything is wine and roses after you get a big win. He will have to learn to manage his success very quickly."

Martinez learned that lesson well. He famously expressed that he felt ready to retire when he compared the more than 100 messages he received just minutes after beating Julio Cesar

Chavez Jr. in 2012 with the four messages he got on his phone after losing to Miguel Cotto two years later – especially after learning that three of those came from his mother.

But after seeing his brother and many other fighters around him experience the same thing, Matthysse seems indifferent to that possibility.

"People will criticize you regardless of how well you do. That's just who we are as Argentines. When you win, everyone pats your back. But when you lose, they're the first ones to destroy you," he said. "By facing Pacquiao, I think that I already have the acknowledgement of all boxing fans in Argentina after having a great career ... I feel loved by my people. They are happy for me every time I represent them abroad. I have no regrets and I don't owe anybody anything in terms of accomplishments."

And he has good reason to anticipate that love continuing regardless of results. After all, Maidana, the Huck Finn to Matthysse's Tom Sawyer act during their teenage years, seems to enjoy an unparalleled level of respect among casual and hardcore boxing fans today, even though he ended his career with back-to-back losses against Floyd Mayweather. Apparently, fans appreciate more the fact that he gave his absolute best against the world's best fighter – and came quite close to winning the first bout – than the fact that he didn't bring the belts home.

The only unforgivable crime at this point might simply be not giving his countrymen a good show. But that thought has no place in Matthysse's mind right now – not even after his lackluster performance against Tewa Kiram in January.

"I don't really think I had 'bad' fights. I always fought the best. I had a year off and came back to win big. Against Kiram I didn't look great, but it was an isolated thing. I don't see myself coming off a bad streak at all," Matthysse said, adding that Pacquiao, who dropped a controversial decision to Jeff Horn in his most recent fight, is in the same position.

"Our last couple of fights haven't been good, but I can only talk about my own fights. In my case, the opponent didn't bring it. I was well prepared, but (Kiram) never came out of his shell. That's why the fight was not good. Sometimes you can get it done, other times your plan just doesn't work."

Basic boxing economics indicate that Argentine fighters are almost always forced to fight away from home if they ever want to make it, but for a fighter who literally ran away from his childhood home to become a fighter, any doubts about his chances of rising to the challenge in a completely hostile environment don't even warrant a response. And yet, basic boxing interview protocol mandates that the question must be asked.

"Fighting in Malaysia will make no difference," Matthysse replied. "I always fought away from my family and this time is a little bit farther away, but I am very happy to visit another country and show my skills elsewhere. This is great in itself, but if I win, I am sure I will add another page to Argentine boxing history."

Martinez, ever the optimist, sees even more upside in Matthysse's impending moment of truth.

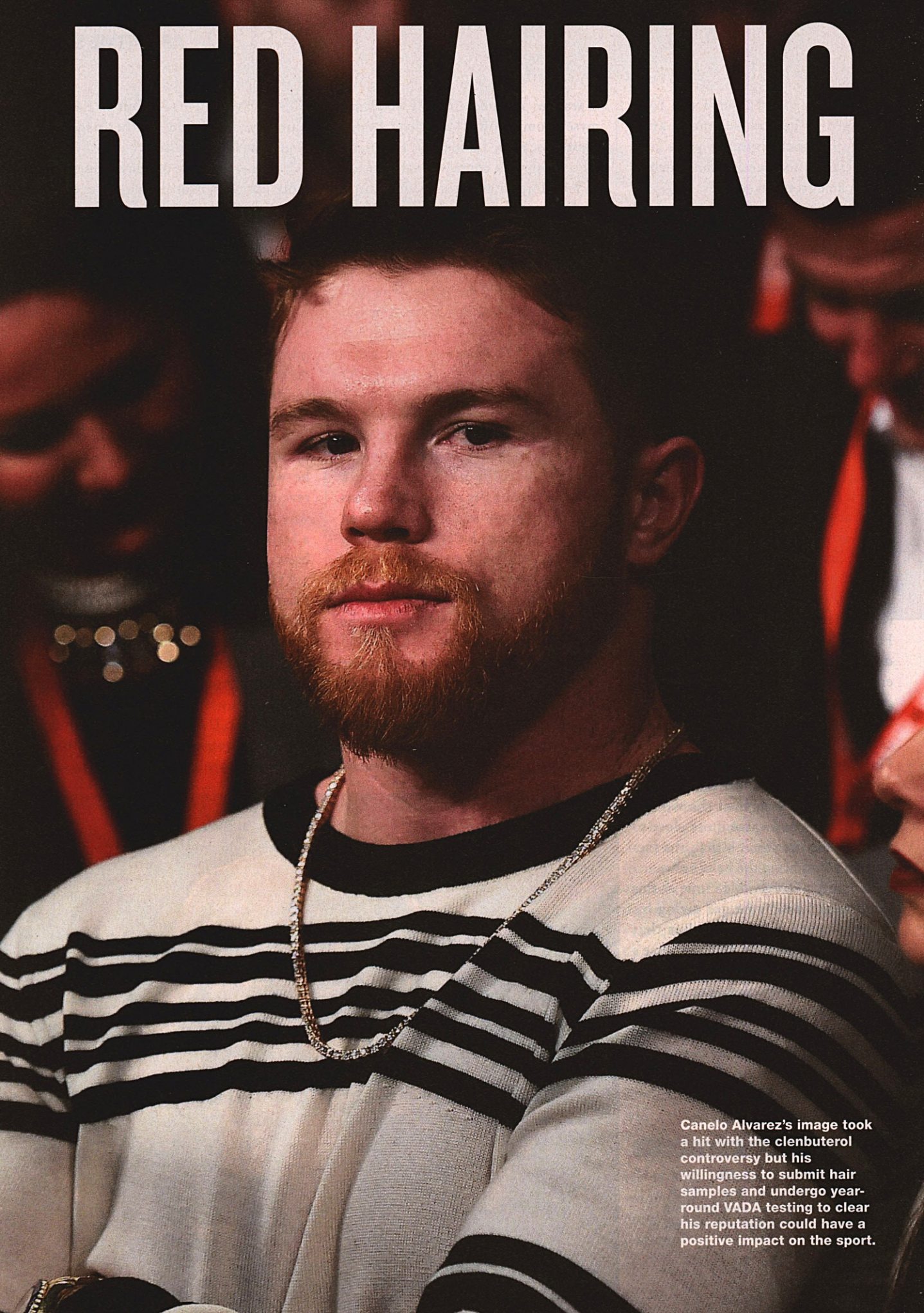
"Finally there is a big fight for a great fighter, a great challenge for a great guy," he said. "I was fortunate to train alongside Lucas and he is a top professional, fully dedicated, and a terrific guy. He is a serious, grounded guy. Very few people deserve this shot more than Lucas. And all Argentine fighters deserve to know that these fights are possible."

If Matthysse manages to put forth one of his all-time best performances, he will be among Argentina's most revered fighters, win or lose. But either way, it's a tall order for a fighter facing a legendary competitor with his own legacy and name on the line.

"Having a great fight against Pacquiao could mean a great curtain-call to my career," Matthysse said, hinting that this could very well be his swan song. "Without a doubt, he's one of my best opponents ever. I have fought many of the best fighters out there in the U.S. and elsewhere, but facing Pacquiao at this stage of my career is truly something special." RING

Unknown, untested, unbeaten (38-0) and unwilling to engage for seven rounds, Kiram made Matthysse look bad until the Argentine connected with this left in Round 8.

RED HAIRING



Canelo Alvarez's image took a hit with the clenbuterol controversy but his willingness to submit hair samples and undergo year-round VADA testing to clear his reputation could have a positive impact on the sport.

HAS THE CANELO CLENBUTEROL SCANDAL CHANGED THE STATE OF ANTI-DOPING IN BOXING FOR THE BETTER, OR IS IT ALL JUST MORE OF THE SAME?

By **Michael Montero**

Unless you've been sleeping under a rock the last few months, you're aware that the rematch between Saul "Canelo" Alvarez and Gennady Golovkin was canceled due to an anti-doping violation. The Mexican star blamed contaminated meat for his positive drug tests, yet ultimately was still suspended by the Nevada Athletic Commission (NAC). This is the most notable performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs) case involving an active superstar that boxing has ever known. The timeline of events follows:

January 29: Canelo-GGG 2 is officially announced for Saturday, May 5.

February 3: Alvarez and Golovkin sign an agreement with the Voluntary Anti-Doping Association (VADA) to begin drug testing for their rematch.

February 6: Golden Boy Promotions files a permit request with NAC to hold the fight at the T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas.

February 14: NAC approves Golden Boy's permit request.

February 17 and 20: VADA collects urine samples from Canelo Alvarez in Guadalajara, Mexico, to be tested for all PEDs listed on the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) Prohibited List. This marks the first time Canelo was ever tested while in Mexico.

March 5: VADA sends a letter informing those involved that Canelo's urine samples tested positive for traces of banned drug clenbuterol – 600 picograms in the sample taken on the 17th, and 60 picograms from the 20th (a picogram is one trillionth of a gram). Golden Boy Promotions releases a statement blaming tainted meat for the positive tests, and Team Alvarez relocates camp to their normal location in San Diego, California.

March 11: Alvarez, his lawyer, and Golden Boy president Eric Gomez fly from San Diego to Las Vegas to meet with NAC officials at 9 a.m. Canelo is interviewed for more than an hour.

The anticipated May 5 rematch between Canelo and Golovkin was scrapped due to Alvarez's positive tests and subsequent suspension by the NAC.

March 23: NAC temporarily suspends Canelo Alvarez per its regulations.

March 29: A certified medical assistant contracted by NAC collects a urine sample and around 20 hair follicles from the nape (lower rear) of Alvarez's neck and forwards them to the Sports Medicine Research & Testing Laboratory (SMRTL) in Salt Lake City, Utah, for testing. The samples are sent with nothing more than the name of the medical assistant and a code, ensuring unbiased processing and strict privacy.

April 3: Golden Boy Promotions holds a press conference in Los Angeles to announce Alvarez will withdraw from the May 5 rematch with GGG. Nothing is mentioned of the hair samples collected only days prior.

April 10: SMRTL informs NAC that the urine sample, tested for the full WADA Prohibited List, was negative for PEDs.

April 13: Alvarez has arthroscopic surgery to remove a cyst and repair surrounding cartilage in his right knee.

April 18: NAC conducts a hearing, which is attended in person by Golovkin promoter Tom Loeffler and trainer Abel Sanchez, while Canelo and his attorneys elect to call in. A settlement agreement is reached to suspend Alvarez for six months. Golden Boy Promotions subsequently announces that Canelo will return to the ring on Saturday, September 15, the day before the Mexican Independence Day holiday.

April 20: SMRTL informs NAC that the hair follicle samples, tested for clenbuterol only, came back negative for the drug.

The negative result of the hair follicle test lends credibility to the contaminated meat excuse from Alvarez. Mexico has a well-documented history of livestock contaminated with clenbuterol that has affected numerous athletes from the country in recent years, including several boxers. The drug, a bronchodilator (increases air flow to the lungs) that can also be

used to increase lean muscle mass and reduce body fat, is only detectable in urine for about a week depending upon dosage and frequency of use. However, clenbuterol can show up in hair for well over a month, depending on hair color and length.

If Canelo were indeed regularly using the drug with the intent to cheat, it would have almost certainly been detectable in his hair. Alvarez, currently the biggest cash cow (no pun intended) in boxing, is the only notable fighter to ever offer hair samples for testing, and for that he deserves credit. If the top money man in the sport can do it, than so can any other fighter in future cases.

On the surface it appears that Alvarez made an honest mistake and has been completely exonerated by the hair test. Case closed – right? Not so fast.

"There is no 'silver bullet' in regards to drug testing," NAC Executive Director Bob Bennett told THE RING. "Hair testing is very complex and most labs don't do it. If you have lighter hair, blond, gray or red, it's even more difficult."

Dr. Daniel Eichner of SMRTL adds that there are many caveats that complicate hair testing.

"Different hair color can affect test results. Even shaving the head can cause issues," said Eichner. "It is absolutely possible that a person could test positive for a banned substance in their blood or urine, yet test negative with hair. When it comes to hair testing, a 'no find' does not irrefutably prove there was no drug in the system."

Bennett is quick to point out that although Alvarez's hair sample came back negative, NAC stands firm with their strict liability policy on PEDs.

"Bottom line is you have to take ownership that it's in your system, whether it was intentional or unintentional," said Bennett. "Canelo is very fortunate that he got six months instead of 12 months. NAC Chairman (Anthony) Marnell and the commissioners were very objective and fair."

The variances, detection limits and reliability of hair follicle testing as it relates to drugs like clenbuterol has been a heavily debated subject among self-proclaimed PEDs experts on social media in recent months.

Most anti-doping groups currently do urine and blood testing only.

"We would add hair testing once WADA conducts further research on results certification and levels, and which results could indicate false positives and false negatives," VADA president Dr. Margaret Goodman told THE RING. "Until that time, we don't wish to create an unfair environment utilizing hair results that could be debated under legal scrutiny."

Victor Conte, infamous for his cutting-edge yet illegal work as the founder of the Bay Area Laboratory Co-Operative (BALCO) decades ago, is known today as one of the most sought-after experts on the subject of PEDs in sports. After serving prison time in 2005 following the BALCO scandal, Conte has since used his expertise to foster clean sport and has helped start the current anti-doping movement in boxing.

He warns that a hair test may only be as good as the length of the follicle itself.

"Typically, nape-of-the-neck hair growth is about one centimeter per month," said Conte. "That's really the fastest place on the body for hair growth, and therefore, you're going to get the most recent period of time for testing."

So, in theory, if the hair follicles collected from Alvarez were only a centimeter in length, and they were collected in late March, that would only take us back to late February, weeks after the initial positives from Canelo's urine samples.

Golden Boy Promotions, which owns THE RING, was contacted for this story but did not divulge details on Alvarez's hair test beyond the basic information that the company had circulated in a press release.

This has been a common denominator with anti-doping cases in recent years. Details are hard to come by, and we are often left with more questions than answers.

Why did it take two weeks after Alvarez and Golovkin signed with VADA for them to collect the first samples? Why had Alvarez never been tested by VADA in Mexico prior to February 17 of this year? How could Alvarez, who has lived in Mexico his entire life, be seemingly completely ignorant about the meat contamination issues in his homeland?

And if he was oblivious to the problem, why didn't his promoter educate their star attraction and implore him to take the necessary precautions to prevent any issues? The same could be asked of the World Boxing Council (WBC), which is headquartered in Mexico City.

One question many have brought up is why an accelerated testing program was not part of the suspension NAC levied on Alvarez, who is back home in Mexico without a fight currently scheduled, where NAC does not have jurisdiction. Any possible drug testing would have to be initiated by Alvarez himself or one of the sanctioning organizations.

Which begs perhaps the greatest question of all related to this case: Why was Alvarez not enrolled in the WBC's year-round Clean Boxing Program (CBP) after his draw with Golovkin last September? Per the program guidelines posted on the WBC site, any boxer who is rated in the top 15 of their world ratings and/or becomes eligible to challenge for one of their titles is immediately subject to testing.

WBC President Mauricio Sulaiman, who has recently gone out of his way to repair the once touchy relationship between himself and Mexico's most popular active fighter, immediately defended Alvarez when the clenbuterol scandal broke. He cited several cases of clenbuterol contamination in recent years and went on record stating that "he (Canelo) has our absolute vote of confidence."

"Canelo has been enrolled with VADA for several fights," Sulaiman replied when asked why Alvarez had not been enrolled in CBP. "VADA tested him and GGG for the first fight, so it was obvious and confirmed that VADA was testing for the second fight."

What Sulaiman fails to mention is that fight-specific testing is temporary; it occurs from when the fighters sign the paperwork up until the night of the bout. Golovkin has been enrolled in CBP since its inception in 2016 and has

thus been subject to year-round testing under the program. Canelo, meanwhile, has not.

[Editor's Note: It was announced on May 15, after this article had been completed, that Alvarez enrolled in year-round random testing to be conducted by VADA.]

In fairness, the WBC deserves tremendous credit for being the only sanctioning organization with a year-round anti-doping program like CBP. Every month they provide a list of fighters eligible for testing, fund VADA with a budget and then leave it up to the association to do the rest. The program is a step in the right direction. But there are flaws.

For starters, there are budgetary issues. Strict, consistent, year-round testing through VADA costs around $20,000 a year per fighter. WBC titleholders plus the top 15-rated contenders from all 17 divisions are subject to the program, totaling a necessary annual budget of more than $5 million. The current CBP budget is a fraction of that. Most ranked fighters are not tested enough through the program, if at all.

"More funding is needed so that aggressive testing could be uniformly performed on all fighters," said Goodman. "I would hope that as time progresses, the WBC will be able to expand the CBP, and I hope that other sanctioning bodies follow suit."

Another major issue is the lack of transparency. The details of how a fighter is tested under the program – where, when and how – are not made available to the public. And that's not only regarding CBP, but all PED testing in general. We usually get no specific information beyond the dates of testing and number of times a fighter is tested.

The details matter, because not every testing sample is created equally. For instance, collecting urine from a fighter minutes after they wake up produces a very concentrated sample. Whereas urine collected after a two-hour workout and liters of water consumed produces a diluted sample.

"I remember a case where a world-class sprinter who was suspected of using PEDs was tested after a competition late at night," said Conte. "The doping control officers stayed there with her until 3 a.m. Their urine sample was so diluted that it could not meet the on-site specific gravity test, so they collected no sample because they simply were unable to get one."

In the world of anti-doping, where we are dealing in nanograms and picograms, the quality of the samples and consistency in which they are collected are of dire importance. And for all the energy spent discussing ongoing issues of PED testing, none of this even begins to address other concerns of fighter safety, such as Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE).

To say that boxing has a long way to go in regard to these matters would be an understatement. Will the sport's anti-doping efforts improve, given everything we know and don't know in the Canelo clenbuterol case?

Cynics will tell you this was all nothing more than a temporary inconvenience for the power brokers in boxing. They believe the NAC's suspension was merely virtue signaling. After all the drama, everything still lines up perfectly for the Canelo-Golovkin rematch this September.

But perhaps this case has changed things for the better in the form of awareness. The deficiencies in the current testing system are more visible now than ever – not only for the fans, but the fighters as well.

"Anything that brings attention to the fighters themselves is important," said Goodman. "It stresses the importance of education, and that fighters need to know much more about what they take and the exposures they have when it comes to PEDs."

Victor Conte has become a force for positive change in the realm of PEDs.

One major issue is that when fighters volunteer to do testing through VADA or any other testing group for a specific bout, they essentially control when the testing will begin. Most stars get in the ring only twice a year, leaving sizable gaps of time between fight camps with no testing. "Fighters deciding when they're going to start testing defeats the whole purpose," promoter Lou DiBella told THE RING. "It's self-regulation paid for by the people deciding when it starts."

It took a superstar testing positive to expose the shortcomings of the current system. Perhaps it will take a superstar volunteering for completely random, year-round PED testing at their expense that drives legitimate change.

There is no greater star in boxing at the present time than Canelo Alvarez. He now faces his greatest opportunity to leave a lasting legacy outside the ring that is every bit as important as the one he leaves inside it.

Michael Montero can be found on YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram via @MonteroOnBoxing.

NO RETREAT, NO SURRENDER

FOR THE THREE MODERN INDUCTEES IN THE IBHOF CLASS OF 2018, PERSEVERANCE WAS THE NAME OF THE GAME

By **Tom Gray**

Different weights, different styles, different personalities – but all warriors to the core.

Mexico's Erik Morales won world titles in four divisions and earned the respect of fans and foes alike during an unforgettable 19-year career. The Tijuana icon dodged no one, seeking out the toughest challenges during a golden era at the lower weight classes. Morales was a terrific boxer-puncher who possessed excellent craft.

Ronald "Winky" Wright reigned supreme as the undisputed junior middleweight champion of the world. Getting there, however, was one serious ordeal. Largely avoided due to his tricky southpaw defense and overall quality, Wright fought around the world and came up the hard way. But the cerebral Floridian never got discouraged, and when his moment came to take on the best, he excelled.

It is arguable that Vitali Klitschko's toughest fight came against himself. After reaching the top of the mountain as heavyweight champion of the world, Klitschko's body let him down and forced early retirement at the age of 33. Unfulfilled by his early exit, the hard-hitting Ukrainian launched an improbable comeback after 46 months of inactivity and secured his legacy against the odds.

THE RING looks back on five fights from three great champions who lead the way for the Hall of Fame's Class of 2018 in Canastota, New York.

ERIK MORALES
(52-9, 36 KOS)

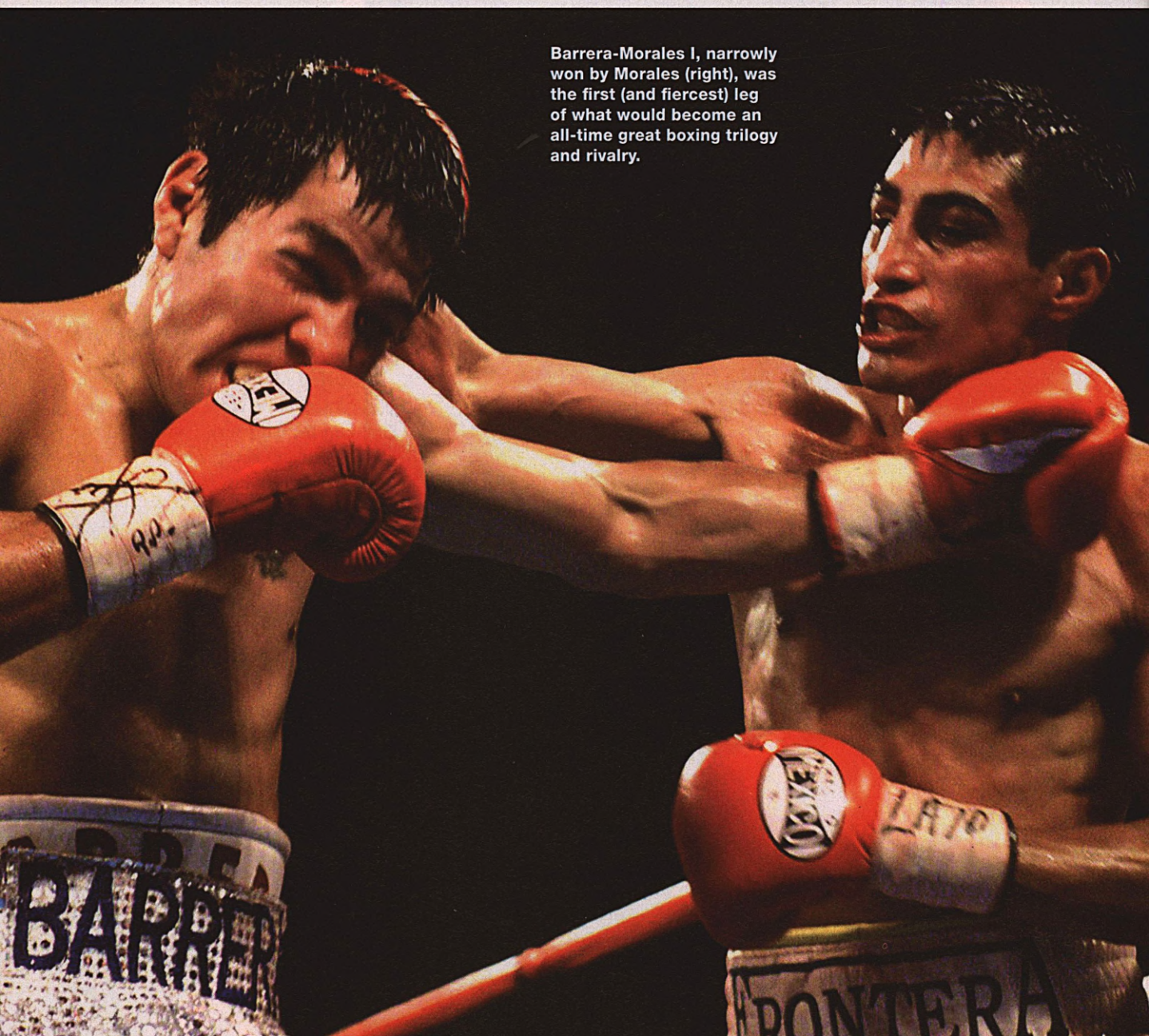
★ DANIEL ZARAGOZA
Date/Venue: Sept. 6, 1997/County Coliseum, El Paso, Texas
Title: WBC junior featherweight

This was your ultimate master vs. student confrontation. The 39-year-old Zaragoza was in his fourth reign as a world titleholder in two divisions and had fought all over the world. The 22-year-old Morales was a highly-touted contender looking to make a name for himself at his countryman's expense. Early on, Zaragoza, a southpaw, provided plenty of problems, but the younger man solved the style. In the championship rounds, Morales began focusing on the veteran's midsection and closed the show with a massive right to the solar plexus.
Result: Morales KO 11

★ JUNIOR JONES
Date/Venue: Sept. 12, 1998/Plaza de Toros, Tijuana, Mexico
Title: WBC junior featherweight

Following three low-key title defenses, Morales faced what many felt was the toughest challenge of his career. Jones was a former two-weight world titleholder who had defeated Mexican star Marco Antonio Barrera twice to stake his claim as a pound-for-pound entrant. However, the Brooklyn native was coming off a loss to Kennedy McKinney and appeared vulnerable. Morales was tagged hard in the early going but quickly took control. In the fourth, a vicious right hand set up a knockdown and the referee called a halt during Morales' follow-up assault.
Result: Morales TKO 4

★ MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA
Date/Venue: Feb. 19, 2000/Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas
Titles: WBC and WBO junior featherweight



Barrera-Morales I, narrowly won by Morales (right), was the first (and fiercest) leg of what would become an all-time great boxing trilogy and rivalry.

Often overlooked and underrated during his prime years, Winky Wright (right) established himself as an undisputed champ and elite boxer with back-to-back decisions over Shane Mosely.

Two Mexican warriors in a battle for pride, and nobody asked for their money back after this one. Morales was considered the fighter on the ascent, whereas back-to-back losses to Jones had seen Barrera's star fade somewhat. However, both men were on fire when the curtain rose for the first battle of an epic trilogy. Every session featured fierce world-class action, but a suspect 12th-round knockdown seemed to have sealed the deal for Barrera. Regardless, two judges saw Morales prevail in one of the greatest fights ever seen.

Result: Morales SD 12

★ MANNY PACQUIAO

Date/Venue: March 19, 2005/MGM Grand, Las Vegas

Junior lightweight non-title bout

In November 2004, Barrera won his trilogy with Morales by posting a second decision victory. In between those battles, Pacquiao had destroyed Barrera in 11 rounds, but a draw with Juan Manuel Marquez proved that the ferocious Filipino was mortal. Against Pacquiao, Morales was the superior technician and he was in the form of his life. Anytime Pacquiao forced him into a firefight, "El Terrible" obliged, even turning southpaw to duke it out in a memorable closing session. This was arguably the greatest victory of Morales' career.

Result: Morales UD 12

★ MARCOS MAIDANA

Date/Venue: April 9, 2011/MGM Grand, Las Vegas

Junior welterweight non-title bout

After defeating Pacquiao, Morales lost four fights in succession. He was outpointed by Zahir Raheem, stopped twice by Pacquiao, and a decision loss to David Diaz looked like the end. When he returned to the ring following a two-year layoff, Morales cut a portly figure at junior welterweight. But he could still fight like hell. Maidana, a rough slugger from Argentina, got the decision, but he'll never forget the great Morales, who tested him to the limits with almost no vision in his right eye from Round 3 onward.

Result: Maidana MD 12

Vitali Klitschko (right) earned the respect of American boxing fans with his bold and bloody stand against Lennox Lewis in Los Angeles.

WINKY WRIGHT
(51-6-1, 25 KOS)

★ FERNANDO VARGAS
Date/Venue: Dec. 4, 1999/Chinook Winds Casino, Lincoln City, Ore.
Title: IBF junior middleweight

Vargas was one of the hottest fighters in boxing, undefeated with 17 straight wins coming inside the distance. The Californian was installed as a heavy favorite but got a dose of reality when the bell rang. Wright pressed Vargas from the start, banking rounds with clean, effective punching and ring generalship. The younger man roared back late, but after 12 rounds, most onlookers felt a new titleholder would be crowned. The judges disagreed and Vargas retained his belt on a controversial verdict.
Result: Vargas MD 12

★ SUGAR SHANE MOSLEY
Date/Venue: March 13, 2004/Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas
Titles: Undisputed junior middleweight

Mosley had lifted the WBA, WBC and RING 154-pound titles by posting a second – albeit controversial – points victory over Los Angeles rival Oscar De La Hoya. The only man to beat now was Wright, who held the IBF version. Mosley, a three-weight world champion, didn't have a prayer. Once again, Wright was the underdog, but this time he controlled so much of the action behind his southpaw jab that there was no room for doubt. Finally, after 14 years as a professional, the super-skilled Floridian was considered an elite-level operator.
Result: Wright UD 12

★ SUGAR SHANE MOSLEY 2
Date/Venue: Nov. 20, 2004/Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas
Titles: Undisputed junior middleweight

Stung by his one-sided defeat, Mosley become obsessed with exacting revenge. Having employed the services of acclaimed coach Joe Goossen, "The Sugar Man" would enter the ring without his father, Jack, as chief second for the first time in 43 outings. The rematch was more competitive but, ultimately, the result was the same. Mosley landed

RICHARD HEATHCOTE

serious bombs in the middle sessions, stunning the champion on more than one occasion. Wright, however, was the more consistent fighter from start to finish and confirmed his superiority in style.
Result: Wright MD 12

★ FELIX TRINIDAD
Date/Venue: May 14, 2005/MGM Grand, Las Vegas
Middleweight non-title bout

"Tito" Trinidad returned from a 29-month layoff to crush Nicaraguan dangerman Ricardo Mayorga inside eight rounds. The Puerto Rican legend looked as good as new, but Mayorga was no Winky Wright. Once again, the odds were against Winky, and once again the cerebral southpaw rendered them meaningless. Wright tortured a bemused Trinidad with a thumping right jab and brought in sharp power shots whenever the moment moved him. This was unarguably one of the finest pure boxing performances of the decade and the best of Wright's illustrious career.
Result: Wright UD 12

★ JERMAIN TAYLOR
Date/Venue: June 17, 2006/FedEx Forum, Memphis, Tenn.
Titles: WBC, WBO and RING middleweight

Having proved his middleweight worth against Trinidad, Wright targeted the top dog at 160 pounds and looked to make history. Taylor had made his bones by posting two razor-tight decisions over long-reigning champion Bernard Hopkins, but he was still in search of superstardom. Many felt the styles wouldn't gel, but fans were treated to an entertaining scrap between excellent professionals. Taylor looked relieved to get a draw, whereas Wright was incredulous. CompuBox, merely a useful guide, favored Wright 226-163 in terms of punches landed.
Result: Draw

★★★★

VITALI KLITSCHKO
(45-2, 41 KOS)

★ HERBIE HIDE
Date/Venue: June 26, 1999/London Arena, London
Titles: WBO heavyweight

The WBO heavyweight title was lightly regarded at the time, but this was Vitali Klitschko's coming out party. The colossal Ukrainian had built himself up to the European level and was looking to make a statement on the world scene. Hide, the more experienced operator, took the first round with flashy combinations and movement, but his success ended there. Klitschko floored the U.K.-based Nigerian with a brace of right hands early in Round 2, and a glancing shot behind the ear took the defending titleholder out completely.
Result: Klitschko KO 2

★ LENNOX LEWIS
Date/ Venue: June 21, 2003/Staples Center, Los Angeles
Titles: WBC and RING heavyweight

Hide was a dress rehearsal, but Lewis was opening night. This fight was hastily arranged when Lewis' original opponent, Kirk Johnson, pulled out due to an injury. And what a shootout it was. Klitschko, who was scheduled to appear on the Lewis-Johnson undercard, stunned the champion more than once and was ahead on all three scorecards by the midway point. However, a big right hand from Lewis had opened a severe cut above the challenger's left eye in Round 3 and the ringside doctor stopped the fight at the end of six.
Result: Lewis TKO 6

★ CORRIE SANDERS
Date/Venue: April 24, 2004/Staples Center, Los Angeles
Titles: WBC and RING heavyweight

Klitschko had all the motivation in the world. With Lewis retired, the vacant heavyweight championship was at stake, and the opponent in the opposite corner had sensationally demolished Vitali's younger brother, Wladimir, in two rounds a year earlier. Lightning would not strike twice. Vitali took revenge, surviving a few rocky moments early in the bout to methodically break down the South African lefty and force the referee's intervention in the closing seconds of Round 8. Klitschko would make one successful defense against Danny Williams before a serious knee injury led to his premature retirement.
Result: TKO 8

★ SAMUEL PETER
Date/Venue: Oct. 11, 2008/O2 World Arena, Kreuzberg, Germany
Title: WBC heavyweight

Few expected to see Klitschko back in the ring, but after almost four years off, the former champ returned. The opponent was a hard-hitting Nigerian whose only loss had come on points to Wladimir, whom he had decked three times. Peter had gone on to pick up a version of the title, but he wouldn't hold it for long. It was as though Klitschko had never left. The Ukrainian icon jabbed off the target easily, winning every round before securing a historic victory when Peter retired after eight.
Result: Klitschko TKO 8

★ CHRIS ARREOLA
Date/Venue: Sept. 26, 2009/Staples Center, Los Angeles
Title: WBC heavyweight

The U.S. badly needed a fistic hero at heavyweight, but the pre-fight odds of 5-1 in favor of Klitschko summed up the unbeaten Arreola's chances. The gutsy Californian spent the entire fight attempting – and failing – to get inside as Klitschko pounded away at will with jabs and well-placed power shots. Arreola would not fall, but his corner smartly waved the fight off at the end of 10 brutal rounds. Klitschko made another seven title defenses before retiring for good and entering the field of politics in his native Ukraine.
Result: Klitschko TKO 10

COME AND GET IT

CLARESSA SHIELDS IS MISSING ONE THING IN HER PLAN TO DOMINATE BOXING: WILLING OPPONENTS

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

GREGORY SHAMUS

Claressa Shields has answered all my questions. Now she has one for me.

"If I was to ask you right now, who was the best female fighter who ever boxed, who would you say?" asks the two-time Olympic gold medalist and current IBF/WBC super middleweight champion.

"Lucia Rijker," I answer.

"I love Lucia Rijker, but I want you to say me by the time I'm done," Shields says. "I don't want you to say Lucia Rijker. That's the goal. I don't want to be 50-50 with somebody. If I can get 60 percent of the world to say that Claressa Shields is the best woman fighter who ever laced up a pair of gloves, I'd be happy."

By the time she's done? At the rate she's going, we may be calling Shields the best ever by next year. Her status as the United States' top amateur is set in stone thanks to those gold medals (won in 2012 and 2016) and a 77-1 record. As a pro, she earned a pair of world titles at 168 pounds in just four fights, defended them once, and now the Flint, Michigan, native is going to fight for two more belts at middleweight when she faces Hanna Gabriels on June 22.

All at 23 years old.

So what's the problem? It's the issue faced by any fighter who may be too good for their own good: finding willing and suitable dance partners.

After turning pro in November 2016, Shields had a solid schedule in 2017, fighting three times. "T-Rex" then got in a January win over Tori Nelson, the start of what she hoped would be a busy 2018.

"I had told (manager) Mark (Taffet) at the beginning of the year that I wanted to fight four times this year and get all the belts at 168, and then go down to 160 and then have my first fight at '54 by the end of the year," said Shields. "From January to now, time just flew by so fast and the fight dates kept getting changed. It was a large amount of time we went without any girls saying 'Yes,' and I was like, 'Whoa.' I didn't expect that. All these girls are in the media calling me out, saying I'm not as great as I think I am, that they

can beat me or give me a run for my money. And any girl who said anything, I would hit up Mark."

Taffet, the former HBO senior vice president who was one of the most influential figures in the sport during his stay with the company, took his fighter's request and went to work, only to hit a brick wall. Repeatedly.

"In order for women's boxing to break through, women have to work three times as hard as the men and they have to be six times as successful," Taffet said. "The best must fight the best. We've been reading so many times from so many of the women boxers that they want their opportunity to shine, they want equality with the men. And Claressa doesn't only talk the talk, she walks the walk. We offered the fight against Claressa to 15 boxers and they declined. And many of them are names that boxing fans know and have read about and heard from."

Finally, Costa Rica's Gabriels, holder of two titles at 154 pounds, stepped up to the plate for the June bout. Shields had a fight.

"I was just excited that she signed the contract," she laughed, well aware that this is likely going to be a theme going forward. She accepts it, but doesn't approve and doesn't understand it.

"If you feel you're the best, you should fight against the best – if they really want women's boxing to grow," she said. "And a lot of them don't. They just want to support their modeling careers and get endorsements and they don't really care about the sport of boxing. Get out of the sport and let the girls who want to train hard and get ready for tough competition get in the spotlight."

Gabriels took that step up, and unbeaten WBC/WBO middleweight champion Christina Hammer is expected to be next in line. The Germany-based titleholder will fight Nelson on the Shields-Gabriels undercard in Detroit, with the hope that Shields and Hammer emerge victorious and meet in a fall superfight. Shields is of the opinion that this will be her first great rivalry. But will it be the last one? Taffet doesn't think so, expecting that the more the spotlight shines on Shields, the more women will be willing to take a shot at beating her.

"I believe that when the other women see the opportunities developing, when they can turn on the television on a weekend in prime time and see women boxing, they will step up," he said. "The money will be there, the fans and the viewership will be there, the accolades and the history will be there, and they will follow."

Shields will be waiting, and as she makes the unusual move of going down in weight to chase titles, the more notable names will increase. There's the current welterweight queen, Cecilia Braekhus, at a catchweight of 154 pounds. And there's another member of the pound-for-pound list, Layla McCarter. With fights like that alone, Shields will have the opposition she needs to build a legacy no one will ever forget.

"What happens in the ring, happens in the ring," said Taffet, "And I know this: When the best fight the best, there are no losers. If you show your heart and your courage in the ring, the fans always want to see you. Arturo Gatti lost a few fights in his career. Oscar De La Hoya lost a few fights in his career. I never met a fan who didn't want to see those guys fight. And the same thing will happen with the women who wear it on their sleeve and put it all on the line in the ring."

If they do, Shields doesn't just get her opportunity to be great, but also to see the sport grow around her. And as much as the Olympian wants to achieve her own personal goals, she's just as ambitious to make women's boxing as big as possible.

"I wanted to turn pro because I wanted to help the cause," Shields said. "I don't want women's boxing to die. I want it to keep going, I want it to grow and I want it to be on the same level as the men. So I always told myself, 'If I turn pro, I'm gonna be the one to do it.' I've never seen a woman advocate for the whole sport of women's boxing. (Like) it's what she wants, what she needs. She never wanted to carry the whole sport, and if she did, they didn't have the skill set. I feel like I come with the whole package. I can fight, I've got charisma, I'm aggressive ... I'm also nice. (laughs) It's about growing the sport so that the girls coming up from the amateurs don't have to go through these same struggles."

But why? Why care about everyone else?

"I was an amateur from 11 years old to 21 and I watched these girls put their life on the line," she said. "I watched girls who trained with me and helped me get to where I am, and I feel like it's just disgusting that MMA has been around for less time and they get more recognition than most of the fighters who are fighting. I was fighting 20 times a year, five times back-to-back, making 165 pounds every day. I put my body through all this turmoil and there are other female boxers who do that, and we don't do that for no reason. Boxing is my life. That's what I do. I don't have another job. Boxing is my job."

'BOXING IS MY LIFE. THAT'S WHAT I DO. I DON'T HAVE ANOTHER JOB. BOXING IS MY JOB.'

Among the ladies, few do it better. But that's not enough.

"She has told me many times that she wants to be the best pound-for-pound fighter in the world," said Taffet. "Not the best pound-for-pound women's fighter, but the best pound-for-pound fighter, period. That's a great goal. I love that, and it's something she has the ability to achieve. I believe we'll see that day."

It's possible. Because at 23, she's only going to get scarier.

"Maybe when I turn 30 or 32, some young Claressa Shields will pop up and give me a run for my money," she laughs. "Or she'll try." RING

VICTORY FOR TWO

MIKEY WILLIAMS FOR TOP RANK

ISAAC DOGBOE'S JOURNEY TO WINNING A WORLD TITLE WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY HIS FATHER'S STRUGGLES BEHIND THE SCENES

By **Joseph Santoliquito**

The eye contact said it all. Paul Dogboe didn't have to say anything to his son, Isaac, the newly minted WBO world junior featherweight titleholder. Paul just darted a glance at the pint-sized star from Ghana, Isaac returned a knowing look and they grinned, sitting together in the main lobby of the Renaissance Philadelphia Airport Hotel.

It was roughly 16 hours after Isaac's most significant professional victory, an exciting 11th-round TKO over Jessie Magdaleno that was an ESPN-televised main event at Temple University's Liacouras Center.

For a few hours on a tranquil Sunday on the outskirts of Philadelphia, Paul and Isaac had the chance to relax and reflect. It was the last bit of tranquility they'd get before the storm of adulation that would be upon them when they returned to their home country.

"It has been a long road," Isaac kept repeating. "I never felt I faced any challenges. My father was the one who always kept that away from me. I never felt there was a rock bottom when I was coming up. All of the pressures and challenges my father handled, and he continues to handle them.

"But I thought after the (2012) Olympics, I thought life would be easier. We got a few offers, but my father decided we should take the road and build ourselves up. Mentally, it makes you strong to go through the storm. It toughens you up. We had past management issues. My father wouldn't let anything happen to me."

Paul Dogboe is a former military man who has his son run on hot sand and up mountain slopes to train for fights. Paul kept things simple: Isaac's job was to prepare, train and fight. Paul's job was to do everything else, including insulating Isaac from what sometimes could be boxing's seedy underbelly.

At this moment, Paul looked at Isaac, and his son nodded back – and father and son both laughed as the previous night's fight against Magdaleno replayed on a Mac laptop positioned on a finely varnished mahogany table.

Paul didn't want to mention names, though he openly referred to a pile of frustration stemming from false promises, outright lies and the legal entanglements that followed. Paul was rigid in his demands: Isaac was not to go around and sell tickets like some of the undercard fighters on the Dogboe-Magdaleno show were asked to do.

Paul, Team Dogboe agreed, would eat the nails. Isaac, 23, would be staying in luxurious hotels like the Renaissance.

It was also essential that Isaac continue his education, because Paul wasn't about to let his son toss his future completely into the unstable world of boxing.

"We had to get out of management situations, and in a boxer's career, that's the most difficult situation a boxer can have. And we had a few," Paul said. "From the beginning, that's what I faced. I wouldn't let Isaac know. The first management we had, I made sure Isaac had to train and box, and he wasn't going to go around selling tickets.

"That was all said from the beginning. I told people my son is an Olympian. He's going to go to school. If he was a boxer and not going to school, that would have been different. I'm the one who hit rock bottom. I didn't want Isaac to see my frustration of going into debt and dealing with these people."

There was the time Paul wanted to break loose from the first deal Team Dogboe signed. Isaac, like every other young fighter, was promised anything under the sun. An investment group was supposed to take care of Isaac's money and he would be moved fast and placed in the rankings.

Then the fissures began to appear. The manager told Paul that Isaac had to sell tickets; Paul railed against it after specifying that wasn't part of their original contract. Then the manager wanted the money back.

The father-and-son team of Paul and Isaac Dogboe has emerged as a formidable combination in the 122-pound division.

MIKEY WILLIAMS FOR TOP RANK

Paul had to raise the cash and wire it to the manager to get out of the deal.

Next, Team Dogboe signed with an American manager. They were staying in a lavish three-bedroom apartment in Woodland Hills, California, and given use of a Cadillac Escalade and occasionally a Lamborghini (Isaac doesn't have his driver's license yet).

Again, there were problems.

The second management team had Isaac fighting at featherweight, yet, according to Paul, when Isaac would show up to weigh in, his opponents were over 130 pounds – some as heavy as 140.

"I told them, 'No, no, no, no, this is not going to happen again,'" recalled Paul, the father of six – five boys and a girl, ranging from 6 to 23 years old. "This is how I am. I am this strict. If you're telling me something and I'm listening, I'm taking your word for it. If you say Isaac is fighting at 126 and he makes the weight at 125.8 and the opponent is 130, or sometimes 140, I kept telling them, 'You're stressing my son too much!'

"We make the weight and the other fighter comes in too heavy. This is why we fell out again with the second management group. We told them that if you don't correct things, we would move on. They didn't. The guy tells me that they don't want anything to do with us or my son again. They wanted everything back – and that included hitting us with a $60,000 bill.

"I kept all of that away from Isaac."

After those tribulations, Team Dogboe went home. Paul's father was ailing and eventually passed away, so Paul and Isaac decided to stay in Ghana for a time to form Rising Star Africa Promotions.

"We wanted to get Isaac ranked, and we had the Cesar Juarez fight where the WBO said that we had to raise $117,000 and wire it to them so they could hold it in trust," Paul said. "We had to pay Cesar Juarez that money for his purse. We got the money in 72 hours.

"We still owe that money, and as long as Isaac keeps winning, the people that we owe are relaxed. It's why we were a little afraid when Isaac got knocked down in the first round (against Magdaleno). I said to myself, 'Oh my God, what's going to happen to me?' (laughs) I kept telling Isaac to go to the left, keep going to the left. Isaac kept going to the guy's power hand. We didn't warm up seriously before the fight, and Isaac's timing wasn't right in the beginning. It's a mistake we won't make again."

Both Paul and Isaac began laughing.

"I thought the fight changed in the fourth round," Isaac said. "I had to get warmed up. I didn't warm up properly. From the beginning, I wasn't hurt in the first. I started to think he couldn't hurt me, though I had to tread cautiously. I knew I was much, much stronger than him and I shouldn't be making any mistakes.

"I had to stop chasing his head. I realized I was touching more with the jabs than the previous rounds. I was also much more relaxed. I backed him up. That followed in the next three or four more rounds. In between the fifth and sixth, my dad kept telling me to go to the body and throw double shots, then mix it up and go to the head. But the priority was throwing the body shots. My dad told me when I finish, I should [keep] my hand up.

"It's why when I won, I fell to my knees and prayed. I know the sacrifices my father and my family went through. Winning the title made it all worthwhile." RING

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Vasiliy Lomachenko was relentless in his own inimitable style vs. Jorge Linares, but the Venezuelan veteran proved that Loma is not untouchable.

MIKEY WILLIAMS/FOR TOP RANK

FIGHT ROUNDUP

BY **BRIAN HARTY**

RECENT ACTION AND FUTURE SIGNIFICANCE

VASILIY LOMACHENKO TKO 10 JORGE LINARES

May 12, Madison Square Garden, New York

Next time you use up a roll of toilet paper, save the tube. Save the tube from the next one also (you could speed this up by flinging the TP into the branches of your neighbor's trees). Now tape those tubes to your face, one on each eye, go pick a fight (here comes your neighbor now, in fact) and prepare to get smacked silly. That's probably about what it's like getting in the ring with Vasiliy Lomachenko.

Lomachenko's ability to step – teleport, more like – to his opponents' sides and punch before they can reset is so advanced as to render peripheral vision obsolete. And even when he does stay in sight, with each round his movements fall so into sync with whomever he's facing that it's like he already knows the script. Boxers of the future, if they hope to avoid becoming victims, will need to invent an entirely new kind of awareness to deal with him.

But the reservoir of superlatives was drained long ago in describing Lomachenko. Jorge Linares introduced the word "vulnerable" into the conversation in the sixth round of their lightweight championship fight with a straight right that caught the Ukrainian phenom flush on the face and dropped him for the first time in his career.

Making his debut at 135 pounds after winning titles at both 130 and 126, Loma pressed the reigning RING and WBA champion from the

Jermall Charlo dismantled Hugo Cento Jr. in less than two rounds, furthering his reputation as the 160-pound division's most explosive contender.

outset, but the larger Venezuelan responded with some outstanding bodyshots and uppercuts to keep the early rounds close. Going into the sixth, however, the momentum was settling into Loma's corner. His combinations were getting more ridiculous, he was darting around the blue canvas like a waterbug and his energy was ramping up to the now-familiar cockiness that signals the end of fight night and the beginning of playtime. And hubris is perhaps what compelled him to walk straight into that perfectly timed punch from Linares, who it suddenly seemed had been patiently waiting for his moment.

Lomachenko came out for the seventh a different fighter, conservative and tentative to engage, which Linares exploited in trying to take control of the fight's narrative. It seemed like the king might retain his crown.

And then came the cut. Linares' bane – his own frail epidermis – sabotaged him as it has in so many previous fights, this time above his left eye, and the blood began to flow. It was like shoving ammonia into Lomachenko's nostrils, and from that point on, Linares was safe from no angle. His face red and swollen, the Venezuelan charged out hard in the 10th, but his advantage had been lost. Lomachenko was back in the zone, and nothing could've protected his opponent's liver from the viper-quick left hook that lanced into his side with surgical accuracy. Linares collapsed. He made it back to his feet but couldn't stand straight due to the obvious pain radiating from his gut, and referee Ricky Gonzalez waved the fight off at 2:08. The scorecards would reveal, probably crushing Linares (44-4, 27 KOs) but elevating his reputation at the same time, that one judge had him ahead, 86-84, another had scored it the same for Lomachenko and the third had it even at 85 apiece.

So Lomachenko (11-1, 9 KOs), the new champ at 135 pounds, had done it again. He had asked for the biggest challenge available and had succeeded in mesmerizing fashion, this time witnessed by an average audience of 1.44 million on ESPN.

In 2014, Lomachenko lost a split decision in what was essentially a rules-optional, "this ain't the amateurs" hazing by Orlando Salido in Vasiliy's second pro fight. He learned from that. What do you bet he does the same with the Linares knockdown in just his 12th pro fight? Hard proof could be near. We'll see Loma again on August 25 in Inglewood, California, opponent to be determined, but after that the hope is that promotional factions can be united with enough money to put him in the ring with Mikey Garcia, whose cold-blooded technique and power would make him the most daunting challenge yet.

JERMALL CHARLO KO 2 HUGO CENTENO JR.

April 21, Barclays Center, Brooklyn, New York

Last October it was Jermell Charlo who stamped his KTFO rewards card with a first-round droppage of Erickson Lubin to retain his 154-pound title. In April, it was Jermell's twin brother, Jermall, who reminded us that demolition is a family business, capping his second fight at middleweight with

MIKE STOBE

a second-round knockout of Hugo Centeno Jr.

Much like his brother's win, not much happened before the hammer(s) came down. The first round was uneventful, but in Round 2, the former junior middleweight titleholder from Texas power-jabbed Centeno into reverse halfway across the ring before catching him on the chin with a right hand that launched the final salvo. Centeno was still connected to his senses but Charlo wasn't about to let him back in, and after a couple more rights he slammed the Californian's temple with a left hook that put him into freefall, then nailed him into the canvas with a straight right for good measure. Referee Steve Willis unnecessarily delivered the entire 10-count.

With the win, Charlo (27-0, 21 KOs) claimed his place in the line to face Gennady Golovkin as the WBC mandatory. The post-fight interview orbited around what has become the most noxious turd in boxing (seriously, we can't actually be expected to keep shrugging this off as "just a part of the game") as Charlo was asked about the network and promoter rifts that could prevent the fight from happening. His reply was basically "You guys figure it out."

GERVONTA DAVIS TKO 3 JESUS CUELLAR

April 21, Barclays Center, Brooklyn, New York

Gervonta Davis is gifted. He's a very quick counterpuncher, excellent reflexes, fast in all four limbs, powerful, throws hooks with rib-cracking intent and spears uppercuts straight at the ceiling, and he's very, very motivated. But at just 23 years old he's still getting better, and his stoppage of Jesus Cuellar showcased another of his attributes-in-development: patience.

In his previous fight, ultimately an eighth-round knockout of Francisco Fonseca, Davis had disappointed by losing his IBF junior lightweight title on the scale. So this time, with the WBA title on the line, Davis was looking to show some discipline.

He put Cuellar down with a straight left to the body in Round 2. He might've followed that up with a swarm of bombs, raining down youth on his 31-year-old foe to draw the ref's intervention, and in all likelihood that would've worked. But Cuellar – coming in with 16 months of inactivity following a split-decision loss to Abner Mares – was still a dangerous puncher and there was no need to get reckless, so Davis stayed focused and calm, punching hard but not stupidly for the remainder of the round. In the third he increased the pressure, put Cuellar down again with a bodyshot and then cleaned up with a flurry against the ropes, dropping the Argentine for a third time.

It was an intelligent, mature performance from Davis (20-0, 19 KOs), and yet another demonstration of the Baltimore native's deep potential. In his post-fight interview he called out the winner of an expected matchup between Tevin Farmer and Billy Dib for his old IBF belt, now vacant: "Let's unify, baby!"

Gervonta Davis' crushing stoppage of Jesus Cuellar reminded the boxing world that he's a top junior lightweight (especially now that Vasiliy Lomachenko campaigns at lightweight).

ISAAC DOGBOE KO 11 JESSIE MAGDALENO

April 28, Liacouras Center, Philadelphia

Isaac Dogboe walked a rough path to reach the ring he shared with Jessie Magdaleno in Philadelphia (see page 46), and just moments after the opening bell it was clear the journey would end horribly. Halfway through the first round, Magdaleno, making the second defense of his junior featherweight belt and his first appearance in a year and six days, caught the onrushing Dogboe with a right-handed chop that staggered the Ghanaian, priming him for the left that put him on his back underneath the ropes. And just like that, children were left weeping inconsolably as all the hopes and dreams of an entire nation turned to ashes and… oh, he got up.

What followed was two undefeated fighters in a very entertaining scrap that firmly established Dogboe as a titleholder with a fan-friendly style. In Round 5, he ducked a hook and came from below to land a hybrid hookercut of his own, the force of the punch nearly separating both of Magdaleno's feet from the canvas before he fell. There were multiple heavy exchanges in the rounds ahead, but ultimately the man from Las Vegas would fall twice more in the 11th before referee Benjy Esteves Jr. stepped in.

At the time of the stoppage, all three judges had Dogboe (19-0, 13 KOs) in the lead: 97-91, 95-93 and 96-91.

GENNADY GOLOVKIN KO 2 VANES MARTIROSYAN

May 5, StubHub Center, Carson, California

Everything was just a little off. In the preceding bout, "First Lady" Cecilia Braekhus had been knocked down for the first time in her career. When Golovkin entered the arena, the walk seemed to go on forever and lead nowhere, his entourage meandering through the audience as if lost in a maze. And then in the ring there was a really awkward "flag exchange" between Golovkin and Vanes Martirosyan, who we would later learn had told his wife to stay at home that night. Martirosyan's trunks, random candy-colored shapes sprinkled on a white background, were slightly nauseating in their resemblance to a Christmas fruitcake. Considering the way things had gone in the buildup to Canelo Alvarez-Golovkin II, which was called off after Canelo tested positive for clenbuterol, it seemed not only possible but likely that a member of Team GGG had uncovered some kind of cursed relic while on a training run in the mountains of Big Bear.

There was also a sense of real frustration emanating from Golovkin, a result of the unified middleweight champion being dragged through a draining promotion only to lose millions of dollars and be forced to salvage the date by fighting a man who hadn't been in a ring for two years and had rarely strayed above 154. Not to disparage Martirosyan; he's a world-class fighter, a 2004 Olympian with the guts to accept the assignment, and he even caught GGG

Isaac Dogboe's ruthless body attack was integral to breaking down previously unbeaten 122-pound beltholder Jessie Magdaleno.

MIKEY WILLIAMS FOR TOP RANK

Gennady Golovkin unleashed months of Canelo-inspired frustration upon the head of gutsy-but-outgunned Vanes Martirosyan.

a few times in the first round.

Describing the ending, though, is like trying to describe the individual boulders in an avalanche. Golovkin's final assault would've put dents in a refrigerator. Martirosyan (36-4-1, 21 KOs), a longtime resident of the Wild Card Boxing Club and overall veteran of the L.A. gym scene, said they were the hardest punches he'd ever felt. Meaning the pro-GGG fans got exactly what they came for and all was well. Curse lifted.

Golovkin (38-0-1, 34 KOs) was of course pressed by HBO's Max Kellerman to talk about Canelo after the fight, and the Kazakhstani icon was understandably reluctant to commit to anything. "I want everybody," he said. "Doesn't matter for me with who."

JAIME MUNGUIA TKO 4 SADAM ALI

May 12, Turning Stone Resort & Casino, Verona, New York

If mercy had been in greater supply, this would've been a shorter fight. It *should've* been shorter, at least by a round, but trainer Andre Rozier, the ringside doctor and referee Gary Rosato (who was visibly the most uncomfortable about it) somehow sent Sadam Ali back – twice – to face a dangerous, larger opponent in a fight that was already lost.

It was THE RING's 2017 Upsetter/Comebacker of the Year fighting the Prospect of the Year, with Ali looking to prove that he was the reason for his retirement party-pooping victory over Miguel Cotto – not Cotto's diminished skills – and the 21-year-old Munguia, fighting for only the second time outside of Mexico, just trying to prove he belonged in an HBO headliner.

Munguia (29-0, 25 KOs) floored the Brooklynite with a left hook about a minute into the opening round, and a right hand scored another knockdown a minute later. A dazed Ali (26-2, 14 KOs) survived the final seconds of the round and then wobbled back to his corner to take a seat. It had been a telling three minutes, though. Ali seemingly worked his way back into the fight in Round 2, but was floored again at the end of the session, and it was crystal clear his speed and skills were ineffective against Munguia's power. Asked in his corner if he knew what round it was, he failed the test.

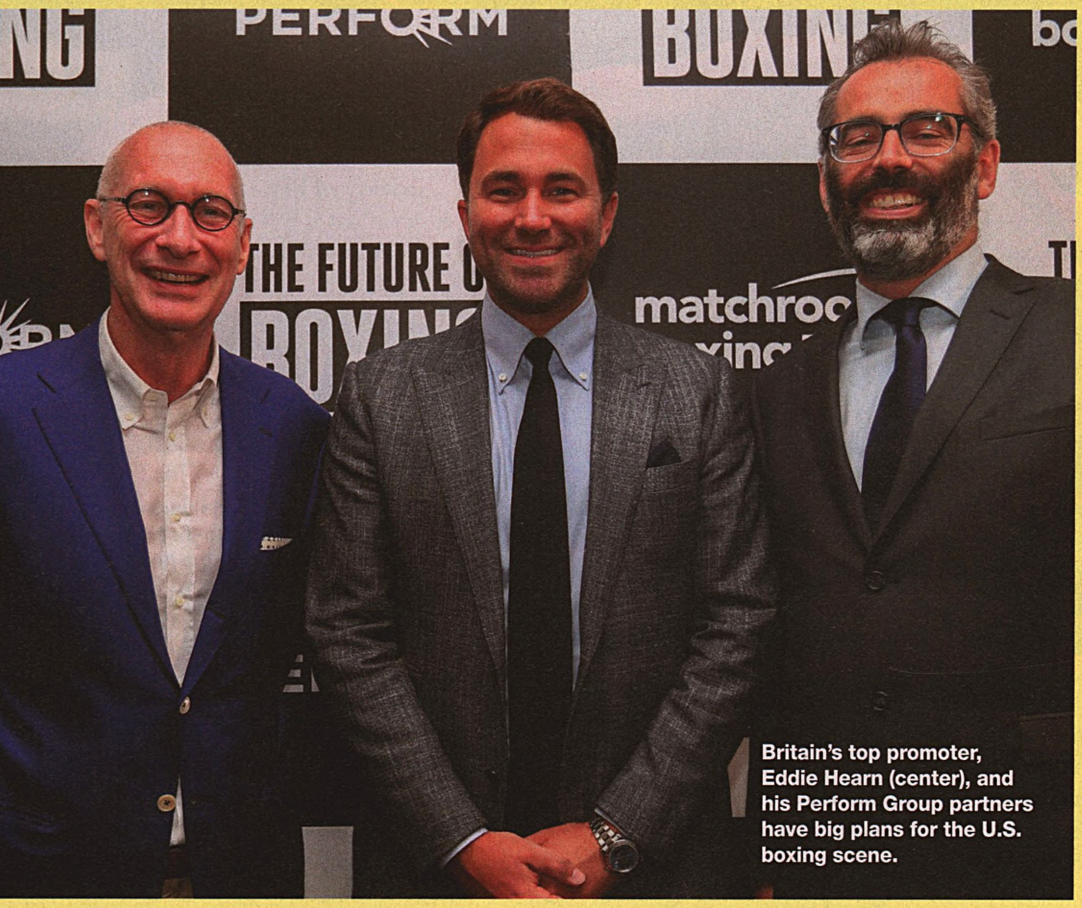
Even if those around him also failed, though, Ali's will was solid and he continued to do what he could to win as long as he was told to do so. Before Round 4 there was some obvious disagreement over whether to let him fight on, but he did so until the fourth knockdown, which drew an immediate stoppage.

What was proven most of all that night is that Munguia, who took home the WBO junior middleweight belt, knows how to deliver a hellacious beating. But give credit for this: Unlike Golovkin, who ended up with an opponent far less challenging than the one who dropped out, Ali accepted a late replacement for Liam Smith, who pulled out two weeks before the bell for medical reasons, and ended up with a monster. The twist there is that Munguia was almost GGG's opponent instead of Martirosyan, but the Nevada Athletic Commission wouldn't approve the matchup. RING

Brian Harty can be reached at bharty@ringtv.com

HARRY HOW

WORLD BEAT



Britain's top promoter, Eddie Hearn (center), and his Perform Group partners have big plans for the U.S. boxing scene.

U.K.

BY GARETH A DAVIES

Eddie Hearn has never known better times. He and his Matchroom Sport boxing outfit now have a master plan to assemble "the biggest stable of fighters ever seen in the U.S." after striking an eight-year, $1 billion (£741 million) transatlantic broadcast deal with online giant Perform Group, a global sports media company that streams live sports through its DAZN on-demand service.

DAZN has been dubbed the "Netflix of sports," and Hearn, promoter of the biggest commodity in boxing right now through his relationship with heavyweight star Anthony Joshua, insists it gives him the clout to step up his assault on the U.S. boxing market by recruiting some of America's finest fighters.

Under the deal, Matchroom will stage 16 fights per year at major venues across the U.S. In a challenge to traditional pay-per-view cable broadcasters, DAZN will be the exclusive U.S. broadcast partner for each of the fights, as well as for Matchroom's 16 fights in the U.K.

"It's a dream come true," said Hearn. "It's a wonderful opportunity for us to build an unrivaled stable in world boxing. When we came to the U.S., we really needed a platform that would give us the volume of dates we needed to grow, and we needed a huge war chest to go out and get the very best fighters in the U.S.

"My job is to put the biggest fights on DAZN in the U.S. and build the biggest stable of fighters ever seen in the U.S. With the war chest I've got, I have every opportunity to do it. There is no excuse.

"All the promoters in the U.S. want us to fail. Everyone will say it's a new platform and it might not work. And I could see the argument. But not with the amount of money I have to spend."

It is also a vehicle for young British fighters, added Hearn, to gain exposure in the U.S. market, and he is busy assembling a 30-fighter stable. He's planning four mammoth events a year, the first to take place in November, with the desire to take boxing "into new cities, new markets."

He added that there is "every chance" Joshua, who is a free agent in the U.S. following the end of his Showtime deal, could fight on DAZN in the future. "Of course, DAZN will be aggressively trying to recruit him to the channel," Hearn said.

Simon Denyer, the CEO of Perform Group, said the move is the latest step toward streaming services becoming the major players in sports broadcasting. "We genuinely believe this is how all sports will be watched in three or four years," he said. "If you look at what has happened with music and what has happened in TV with Spotify and Netflix, it has radically changed things very, very quickly."

And Joshua-Deontay Wilder talks? As THE RING went to press, Wilder's agent Shelly Finkel told me he was "optimistic, awaiting news" from the Hearn/Joshua axis, with the Briton's promoter a little cagier. Knowing the history of boxing's megafights, it will most likely be next year that the juggernauts eventually meet. But we live in hope ...

★★★

Presumably Amir Khan signed

a three-fight deal with Hearn with the plan of fighting British rival Kell Brook as the end game. But we will still have to wait, it seems, while the wrangling continues over the weight they will contest bragging rights at in a fight that really should have been settled two years ago.

But Khan did his best to remind us about that dazzling speed we have all missed for two years when the former junior welterweight titleholder produced a vicious knockout of opponent Phil Lo Greco, blitzing the Canadian and dropping him twice in under 39 seconds.

Khan's blistering fists did all the talking he needed. Speed kills, they say in boxing, and Khan's handspeed has always been dangerous early in fights. But we know he's vulnerable defensively, and that makes him an even more interesting target for the top-level opponents.

Some perspective is needed, given that Lo Greco is not an elite fighter, yet he went the distance with former welterweight titleholder Shawn Porter, and Khan joined current IBF welterweight beltholder Errol Spence Jr. as the only other boxer to stop Lo Greco.

Khan delighted a sold-out arena beside the Mersey, in Liverpool, going to work with a determined immediacy, an electrifying left-right unleashed for the first knockdown of Lo Greco, followed up by a series of left hooks seconds later to finish the show.

"It's been two years, but I have not lost anything. The hunger is still there. My body just needed that break," said Khan.

Brook was there in the ring afterward, and there was plenty of pantomime. Hearn admitted there was much negotiation still to do. "It's a stadium fight," he said. "They asked if Amir Khan still has it. Does he still have the speed? He was even faster. What a statement after his absence from a British ring. This was just brilliant."

★★★

David Haye's 16-year career as a two-weight world titleholder appeared to have ended against Tony Bellew in their rematch under the feverish lights of the O2 Arena in London's Docklands.

It was billed as "Revenge or Repeat." And "repeat" was the clear winner, Bellew prevailing in a shorter, more emphatic and more dramatic fight than his first meeting with Haye, dropping the Londoner three times to stop him in the fifth.

Haye will be remembered as a great cruiserweight in a thin division historically, and one who excelled up at heavyweight. Also as a fighter who knew how to sell his own brand in a career earning him around £20 million. Haye's reflexes, timing and explosive power that once made him such a dangerous fighter now elude him at the age of 37.

The sensible thing is now to retire, but how many times do we hear that, when fighters decide to go on. Haye has not yet announced that he will retire.

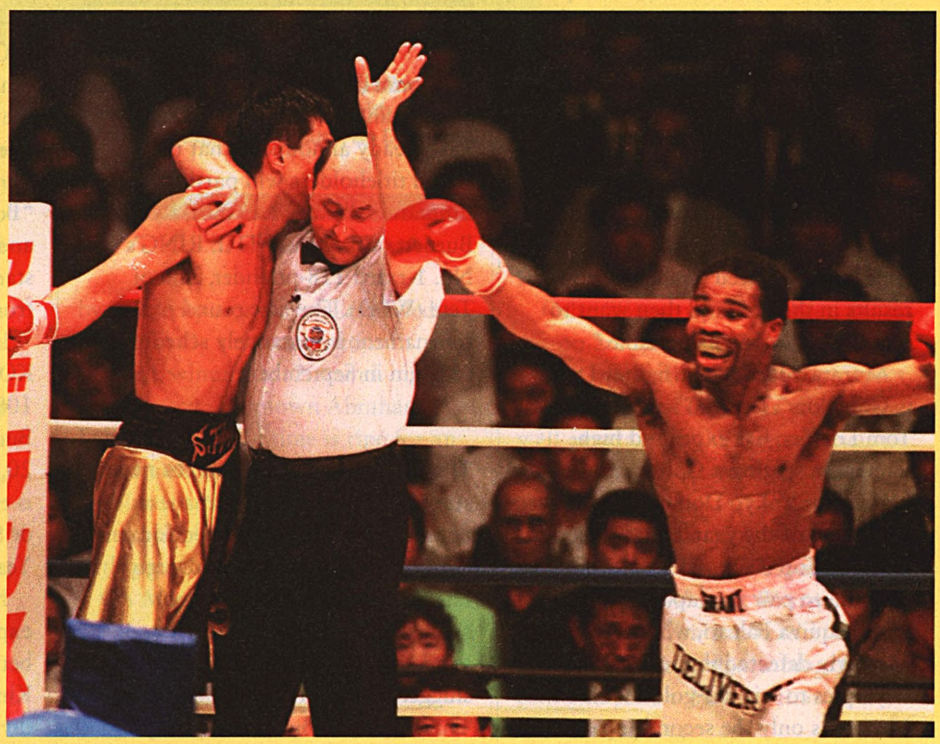
Gareth A Davies is Boxing Correspondent for the London Telegraph.

JAPAN

BY NICK SKOK

In the early summer of 1996 at the Yokohama Arena, Japan lost its first world-class middleweight before it got a chance to get to know him. Shinji Takehara, who had outpointed Jorge Castro to earn the WBA title the previous December, lost the belt in his first defense against William Joppy.

Unbeknownst to the Japanese Boxing Commission (JBC), Takehara had undergone two surgeries in secret to reattach his left retina after the Castro victory. Not completely successful or healed, Takehara had almost no vision in his left eye against Joppy, who stopped him in nine rounds. The 24-year-old had one more eye surgery following the loss and promptly retired with a record



Japan's first world-rated middleweight, Shinji Takehara (left), did not have a long shelf life thanks to American William Joppy. Will Japan's new 160-pound star, Ryota Murata, have a longer reign?

of 24-1 (18 knockouts). Japanese boxing fans wondered if they'd ever see another homegrown champion at middleweight.

Twenty-two years later, Ryota Murata picked up right where Takehara left off, in the exact same building in Yokohama, trying to become the nation's first middleweight titleholder to successfully defend his title. The intrigue drew in an audience of 15 million viewers to witness Murata (14-1, 11 KOs) stop Emanuele Blandamura (27-3, 5 KOs) in eight rounds. Not quite the 30 million that watched his title-winning performance against Hassan N'Dam, but still impressive. *(Editor's note: The "world title" hype around Murata's fight was significant in Japan and shouldn't be ignored, but it also must be noted that he owns the "regular" WBA belt while Gennady Golovkin holds the "super" belt, which THE RING recognizes as the true WBA middleweight title.)*

Teiken President (and Murata's promoter) Akihiko Honda, said of Murata's impending return: "We are good for September or October. It will be at MGM (Las Vegas). If possible, we want to fight an American. We need to achieve good results in the U.S. and then want to face GGG as soon as possible."

Murata added: "The fighter I want is Golovkin." Triple-G's promoter, Tom Loeffler, has expressed high interest in staging a Golovkin-Murata fight at the Tokyo Dome, potentially at the end of the year. Honda rejected plans by Top Rank, who co-promotes Murata, to pair the Japanese star with Esquiva Falcao, whom Murata narrowly defeated in the 2012 Olympics to win the gold medal. Murata is only the second Japanese boxer to win Olympic gold. The first to do it was bantamweight Takao Sakurai at the 1964 Games in Tokyo.

Speaking of bantamweights, Naoya Inoue is expected to enter the next World Boxing Super Series tournament if he defeats Jamie McDonnell on May 25 in Tokyo. The WBSS bantamweight tournament has already announced that three world titleholders will participate: Emmanuel Rodriguez (IBF), Ryan Burnett (WBA), and THE RING's No. 1-rated 118-pounder, Zolani Tete (WBO). The first round of the tournament is tentatively scheduled to begin in September.

Former 115-pound titleholder Naoya Inoue is poised to join the WBSS bantamweight tournament this fall if he defeats 118-pound standout Jamie McDonnell on May 25.

★★★

The JBC handed down its most severe punishment of a Japanese fighter when they suspended former WBC flyweight titleholder Daigo Higa for coming in overweight against Cristofer Rosales, who stopped the popular 22-year-old slugger in nine rounds on April 14. This comes on the heels of the JBC banning former bantamweight beltholder Luis Nery for life for the same offense prior to his brutal second-round demolition of Shinsuke Yamanaka. In addition to the suspension, Higa was fined 20 percent of his purse and his promoter, Yoko Gushiken, was given an official warning for ineffective management of his fighter.

The JBC stated that if Higa wants to have his suspension lifted, he'll have to move up in weight to at least the 115-pound division while giving the commission regular updates on his health. Higa was suffering from panic attacks and sleeping difficulties related to making the flyweight limit of 112 pounds after he won the WBC title last year.

New rules are being drawn up in Japan to combat weight issues, including canceling a fight if a boxer is more than 3 percent over his contracted weight. One of the JBC's goals is to have the major sanctioning organizations adopt the rules to make them more effective. Tsuyoshi Yasukochi, the JBC secretary general, said, "Boxing is a weight-class system and fairness is a must. We'd like to start a new movement in boxing from Japan."

If Ryoichi Taguchi (27-2-2, 12 KOs) defends his RING/IBF/WBA 108-pound titles against Hekkie Budler (31-3, 10 KOs) on May 20, the junior flyweight champ is expected to return in August or September and again on New Year's Eve.

Negotiations continue for an expected September showdown between WBO flyweight boss Sho Kimura (16-1-2, 9 KOs) and two-division titleholder Kosei Tanaka

(11-0, 7 KOs).

Nick Skok is the Japanese Boxing Correspondent for THE RING and can be reached via Twitter @ NoSparring.

SOUTH AFRICA

BY DROEKS MALAN

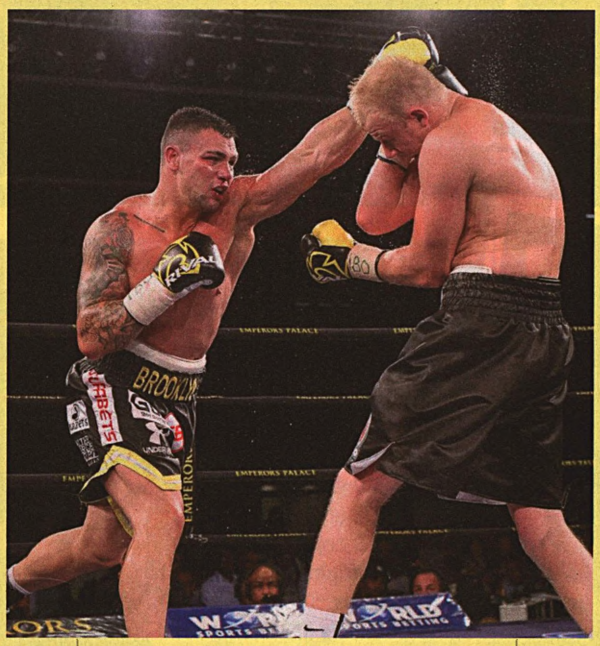
For a country roughly the size of Texas, South Africa has a proud boxing history. Unfortunately, things are less than ideal at the moment, with even our top fighters struggling to find action and the weak currency making it hard to import quality opponents. However, with a little bit of luck, things could change for the better in the upcoming months.

Kevin Lerena, THE RING's No. 8-rated cruiserweight, scored a workmanlike decision over former contender Dmytro Kucher in March of this year and was set to be back in the ring on June 2, fighting in Azerbaijan against Roman Golovashchenko. Lerena, who also holds notable wins over Youri Kalenga and Micki Nielsen, remains a marketable commodity, although, when you look at the contenders ranked above him, he is up against a murderers' row. There is some light at the end of the tunnel, however – should Oleksandr Usyk win the World Boxing Super Series and move up to heavyweight, there may just be some vacant belts available.

South Africa's only world titleholder, No. 1-rated bantamweight Zolani Tete, had a big stage in Belfast on the Carl Frampton-Nonito Donaire card when he defended his WBO belt against longtime two-weight titleholder Omar Narvaez. Unfortunately, Narvaez did his best late-career Hector Camacho impression by turning the fight into a foot race, stinking out the house in the process. Although he won every round, Tete must take some of the blame for not pressing the issue with more urgency.

On the flipside, maybe this will convince one of the other titleholders to step into the ring with the boogeyman of the 118-pound division.

Unbeaten lightweight Xolisani Ndongeni (24-0, 12 KOs), plagued by inactivity after several canceled fights, finally saw some action in April, winning a 12-round decision over unknown Abraham Ndauendapo. The time is ripe for an opportunity against a big name in the division, as Ndongeni is definitely on a short list of South African fighters with potential for world honors.



Kevin Lerena (left) is steadily climbing the cruiserweight rankings with wins over solid opponents, such as Dmytro Kucher.

On May 20 in Japan, Hekkie Budler will have the chance to do something special by becoming the fourth South African since former bantamweight champ Vic Toweel to win a RING title when he challenges the magazine's 108-pound (and WBA/IBF) champion, Ryoichi Taguchi. This won't be easy, though. Taguchi has made seven defenses of his WBA belt, adding the RING and IBF straps in his last bout. Budler, a former strawweight titleholder, has been through many wars and Taguchi is undoubtedly his best opponent.

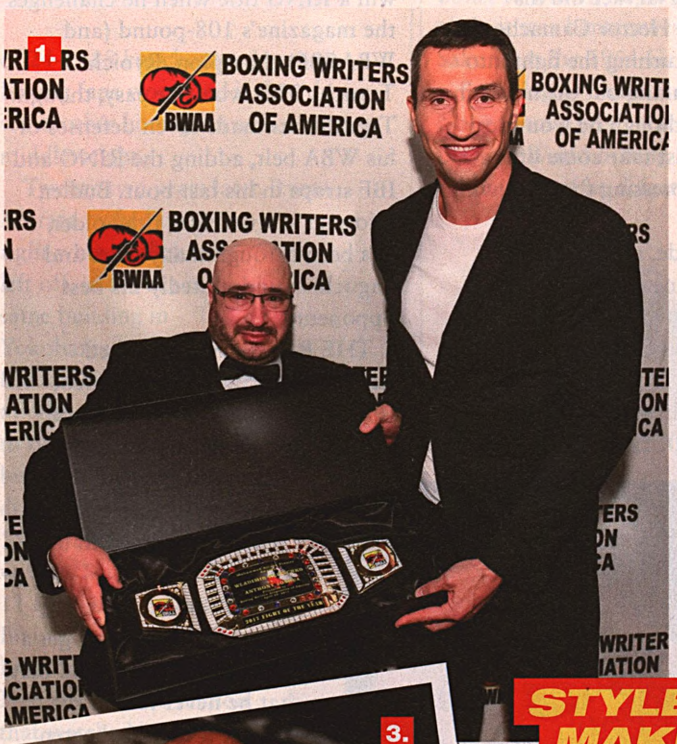
THE RING's No. 7-ranked strawweight, Simphiwe Khonco, is finally set to see action in June after almost a year of inactivity. Former world title challenger Moises Calleros is tentatively slated to be the opponent.

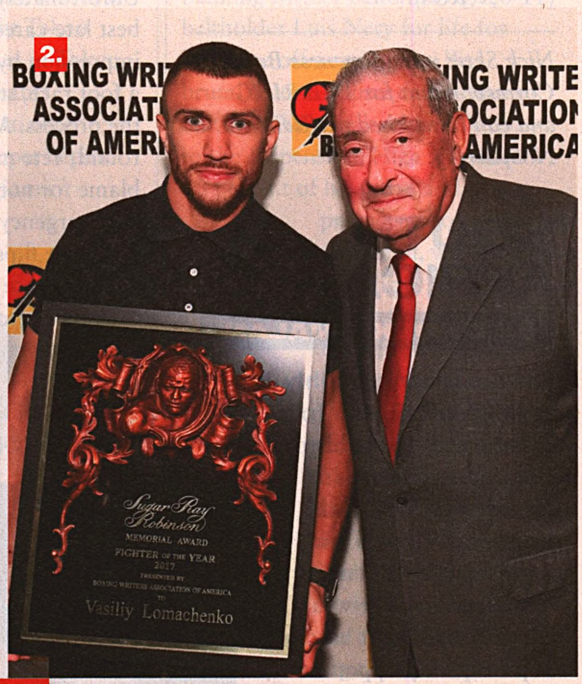
No. 2-ranked flyweight Moruti Mthalane will get a chance to regain his old belt (that he never lost in the ring); he'll meet unbeaten (8-0, 6 KOs) Muhammad Waseem (RING No. 9) for the vacant IBF title in Kuala Lumpur on the Manny Pacquiao-Lucas Matthysse undercard on July 15. Mthalane, who is 35, is hoping his experience is too much for the younger contender from Pakistan.

Welterweight up-and-comer Thulani Mbenge faces a serious step up in class when he faces Diego Chaves on June 23. Chaves has competed at the very top of the division and a win over the Argentine could see the hard-hitting Mbenge move from prospect to fringe contender.

Other top prospects to keep an eye on are featherweight Azinga Fuzile, who will face fellow prospect Lerato Dlamini later this year, as well as strawweight Deejay Kriel, who is set to fight on the same bill as Mbenge.

Droeks Malan is a correspondent based in Stellenbosch, Western Cape, South Africa. You can read his blogs at couchpotatofightguru.blogspot.com and follow him on Twitter @ droeksonboxing.





STYLES MAKE FIGHTS

BWAA 93rd Annual Awards Dinner at the Copacabana in New York City: 1. Wladimir Klitschko (right) with BWAA President Joseph Santoliquito 2. Vasiliy Lomachenko with Bob Arum (right) 3. Bernard Hopkins 4. Lou DiBella 5. Christy Martin and Cecilia Braekhus 6. Daniel Franco.

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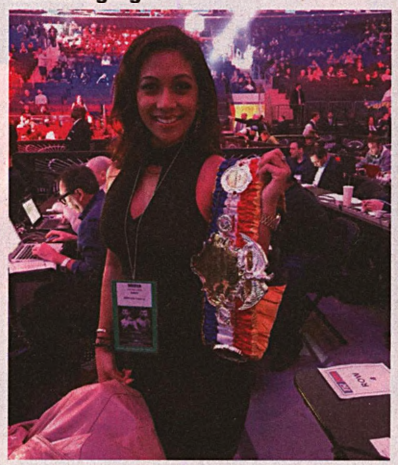

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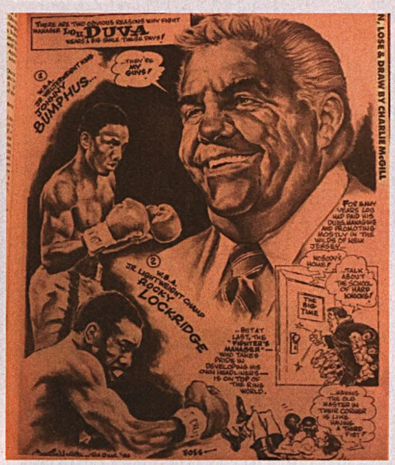

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STILL THE HITMAN

Thomas Hearns sends Sugar Ray Leonard reeling (and soon to the canvas for the second time) during their surprisingly thrilling rematch at super middleweight in June 1989, almost eight years after their classic welterweight confrontation. Hearns was thought to be the more faded of the two aging future hall of famers and was thus installed as a decided underdog by odds makers and sports media, but the Motor City Cobra reminded the boxing world and his arch rival that he was still dangerous by dropping Leonard in Rounds 3 and 11 with his legendary right cross. Leonard reminded Hearns and fans that he had the heart of a warrior by getting up and rallying hard enough in Round 12 to salvage a controversial draw. RING

COMING UP

Errol Spence Jr.'s IBF welterweight title defense against Carlos Ocampo is a hot ticket in Dallas.

JUNE

JUNE 9 – Leo Santa Cruz vs. Abner Mares, featherweights (for Santa Cruz's WBA title), Los Angeles (Showtime); Also, Jermell Charlo vs. Austin Trout, junior middleweights (for Charlo's WBC title).

JUNE 9 – Jeff Horn vs. Terence Crawford, welterweights (for Horn's WBO title), Las Vegas (ESPN).

JUNE 9 – Terry Flanagan vs. Maurice Hooker, junior welterweights (for vacant WBO title), Manchester, England (BT Sport); Also, Tyson Fury vs. Sefer Seferi, heavyweights.

JUNE 16 – Errol Spence Jr. vs. Carlos Ocampo, welterweights (for Spence's IBF title), Dallas (Showtime); Also, Devon Alexander vs. Andre Berto, welterweights.

JUNE 16 – Angel Acosta vs. Carlos Buitrago, junior flyweights (for Acosta's WBO title), Hato Rey, Puerto Rico (DirecTV)

JUNE 17 – Artem Dalakian vs. Yodmongkol Vor Saengthep, flyweights (for Dalakian's WBA title), Kiev, Ukraine.

JUNE 22 – Claressa Shields vs. Hanna Gabriels, middleweights (for vacant IBF and WBA titles), Detroit (Showtime); Also, Christina Hammer vs. Tori Nelson, middleweights (for Hammer's WBC and WBO titles).

JUNE 23 – Billy Joe Saunders vs. Martin Murray, middleweights (for Saunders' WBO title), London (BT Sport).

JUNE 23 – Josh Taylor vs. Viktor Postol, junior welterweights, Glasgow, Scotland (Channel 5).

JUNE 30 – Gilberto Ramirez vs. Roamer Angulo, super middleweights (for Ramirez's WBO title), Oklahoma City, Okla. (ESPN).

JULY

JULY 7 – Jose Ramirez vs. Danny O'Connor, junior welterweights (for Ramirez's WBC title), Fresno, Calif. (ESPN).

JULY 14 – Regis Prograis vs. Juan Jose Velasco, junior welterweights, New Orleans (ESPN).

JULY 15 – Manny Pacquiao vs. Lucas Matthysse, welterweights, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Also, Moruti Mthalane vs. Muhammad Waseem, flyweights (for vacant IBF title).

JULY 28 – David Benavidez vs. Matt Korobov, super middleweights (for Benavidez's WBC title), Los Angeles (Showtime).

AUGUST

AUG. 4 – Sergey Kovalev vs. Eleider Alvarez, light heavyweights (for Kovalev's WBO title), Atlantic City (HBO).

AUG. 18 – Carl Frampton vs. TBA, featherweights, Belfast, Northern Ireland (BT Sport).

AUG. 25 – Vasiliy Lomachenko vs. TBA, lightweights (for Lomachenko's RING and WBA titles), Inglewood, Calif. (ESPN).

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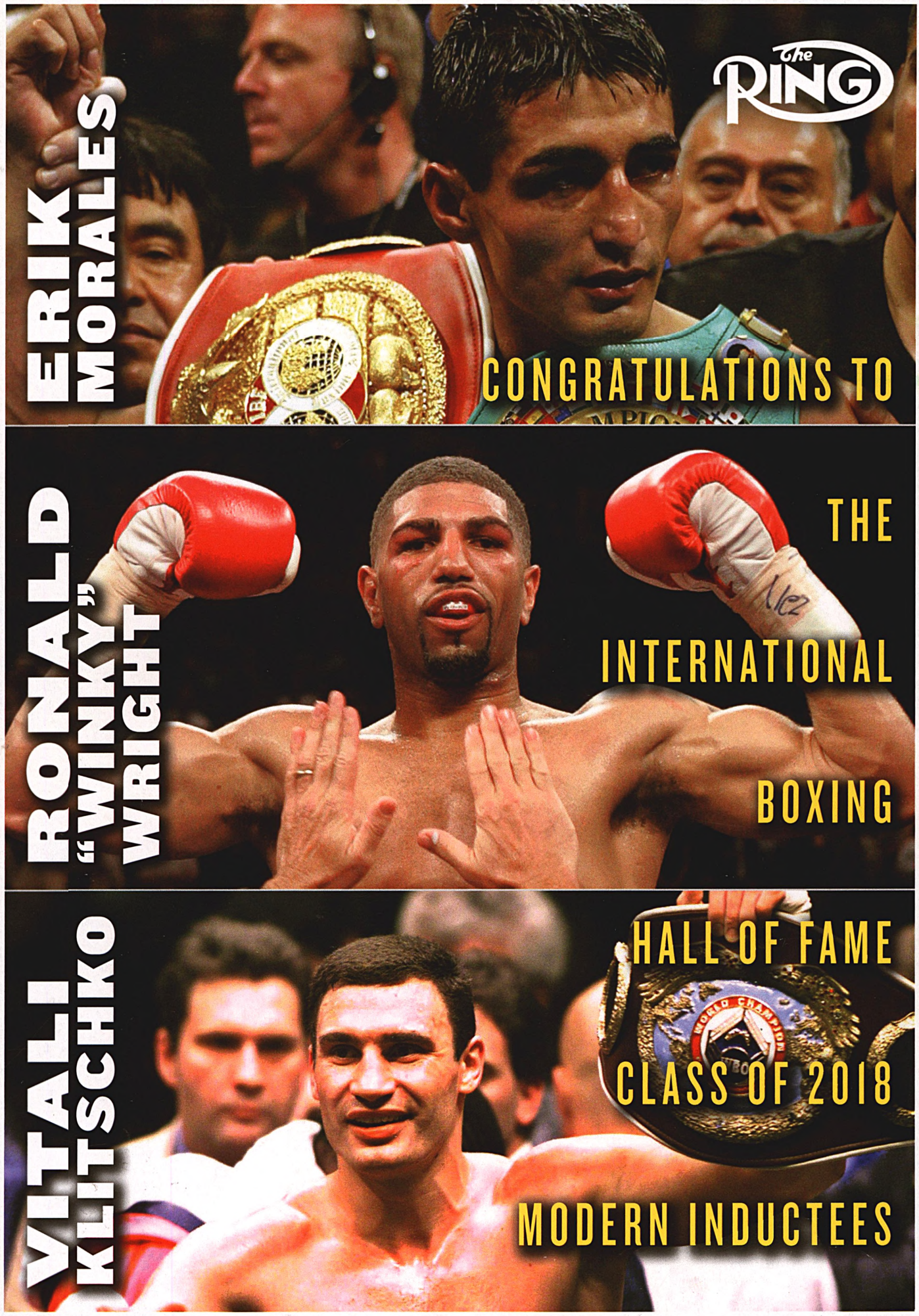
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